

SERMONS
ON
VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY
ANDREW THOMSON, (D.D. 1779-1831)
MINISTER OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH EDINBURGH.)

SECOND EDITION.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED FOR WILLIAM WHYTE AND CO.
AND LONGMAN AND CO. LONDON.

M.DCCC.XXX.



EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY A. BALFOUR AND CO. NIDDRY STREET.

TO THE
SESSION AND CONGREGATION
OF
ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH,
EDINBURGH,
THIS VOLUME OF SERMONS
IS
INSCRIBED,
BY THEIR
AFFECTIONATE PASTOR,
THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

To the First Edition of these Sermons I put no Preface, because I did not think it necessary to make any apology for the publication of them, and had no explanations to offer respecting either the doctrines which they contain, or the manner in which the doctrines are illustrated and enforced. And I now put a Preface to the Second Edition merely for the purpose of alluding to the treatment which they and their Author have received from certain critics, who have deemed it a duty to make them the subject of animadversion.

Far from regarding my Volume as free from faults, or as secure from all just censure, I was fully prepared for the detection of errors, both in its style and its illustrations, and for a difference of opinion in many Readers with respect

to the views of Christian truth and Christian conduct, which, from sincere conviction, I have felt myself called upon to maintain. But I was not altogether prepared for the treatment I have experienced from the Millenarian School of Theology. From the Masters and the Disciples of that School indeed, I could not look for much indulgence, and I did not wish for any approbation. I expected of course to come in for my share of those anathemas, which they so liberally denounce against all who do not worship at their shrine. I expected to encounter no small portion of that arrogant and contemptuous spirit, which is so characteristic of their mode of contending against every one who is bold enough to provoke them by opposition, or offend them by unsubmitiveness. I expected to suffer from the ignorance and recklessness and blundering which form such prominent features in most of those productions, wherewith they have laboured to dissipate the darkness that has settled over all except the happy inmates of their own half inspired and highly favoured circle. I expected all this, and I have not been disappointed. Still, however, I could not look for any violation of truth and honesty in men who assume the office, though they cannot

yet show the credentials of Prophets, and make their vocation to consist in rebuking the moral degeneracy, as well as denouncing the religious stupidity, of their country and their age. And therefore, I did feel surprised and shocked at certain gross misrepresentations of which they have been guilty, and of which, with the view of satisfying my readers as to the title that the Millenarians have to judge of other men, and to become the reprovers of evil deeds, I shall trouble them with the exhibition of two examples.

I have said in Note C. p. 545, "The metaphysics of our antagonists are as bad as their theology. But what can be expected of those who are bold to maintain, that when Christ prayed in the garden, 'if it be possible let this cup pass from me,' he was in his human nature, in his sinful flesh, rebelling against God?"

In referring to this, the Millenarians represent me as deriding the "metaphysics and theology of those who are bold to maintain, that when Christ prayed in the garden, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, it was the expression of the will of Christ's human nature; whence" they say, "the only inference that can be drawn is, that Dr. Thomson supposes his nature had no will at all."

man nature was *not* “sinful,”—“fallen”—and “all evil, even as this fallen world is all evil.”

I have only to add, that to what I have said in my notes on that subject, and on the subjects of the Millennium, of Assurance of Faith, and of Slavery, I firmly adhere, as equally taught by reason and by Scripture; and that my convictions become the clearer and the stronger, the more I reflect on the merits and bearings of the various questions which they involve, and of the various arguments which may be advanced for their determination.

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS.

	Page
Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.—ACTS v. 31.....	1

SERMON II.

THE SACRIFICES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.—PSALM iv. 5.....	23
---	----

SERMON III.

THE SACRIFICES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.—PSALM iv. 5.....	50
---	----

SERMON IV.

THE COMMUNICATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

	Page
Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.—PSALM lxvi. 16.....	76

SERMON V.

JOY FOR TEMPORAL MERCIES.

And there was great joy in that city.—Acts viii. 8.....	106
---	-----

SERMON VI.

JOY FOR SPIRITUAL MERCIES.

And there was great joy in that city.—Acts viii. 8.....	127
---	-----

SERMON VII.

HUMILITY EXPLAINED, AND ITS NECESSITY ENFORCED.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.—JAMES iv. 10.....	148
--	-----

SERMON VIII.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

Be zealous.—REV. iii. 19.....	175
-------------------------------	-----

SERMON IX.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

Be zealous.—REV. iii. 19.....	196
-------------------------------	-----

SERMON X.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

Page

Be zealous.—Rev. iii. 19.....	222
-------------------------------	-----

SERMON XI.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

Be zealous.—Rev. iii. 19.....	247
-------------------------------	-----

SERMON XII.

THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION.

The Gospel of your Salvation.—EPHES. i. 13.....	273
---	-----

SERMON XIII.

FORSAKING PUBLIC WORSHIP.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.—HEB. x. 25.....	299
---	-----

SERMON XIV.

FORSAKING PUBLIC WORSHIP.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.—HEB. x. 25.....	327
---	-----

SERMON XV.

SLAVERY NOT SANCTIONED BUT CONDEMNED BY CHRISTIANITY.

Page

If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.—JOHN viii. 36.....	359
---	-----

SERMON XVI.

CHRIST WITHOUT SIN.

Who did no sin.—1 PETER ii. 22.....	395
-------------------------------------	-----

SERMON XVII.

OBLIGATIONS TO OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER.

I must by all means keep this feast that cometh.—Acts xviii. 21.....	422
---	-----

SERMON XVIII.

OBLIGATIONS TO OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER.

I must by all means keep this feast that cometh.—Acts xviii. 21.....	445
---	-----

SERMON XIX.

FAITH AND PREPARATION AS TO THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

Waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.—1 COR. i. 7.	469
---	-----

SERMON XX.

ARDENT DESIRE FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

Page

Waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.—1 Cor. i. 7. 491

SERMON XXI.

PATIENT WAITING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

Waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.—1 Cor. i. 7. 506

APPENDIX.

Note A, p. 138. On the Assurance of Faith.....	525
Note B, p. 393. On the Immediate Abolition of Slavery.....	531
Note C, p. 404. On the Sinlessness of Christ's Human Nature.	540
Note D, p. 470. On the Millenarian Views.....	546

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS.

ACTS v. 31.

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

ACCORDING to the Scriptures, Christ died that he might secure our redemption, and was afterwards exalted that he might bestow upon us what he had thus secured. The regal power to which he was elevated was the appointed consequence, or just reward, of that saving merit which he established by his humiliation, and sufferings, and “fulfilment of all righteousness.” And that the great objects which he had in view when he “humbled himself and became obedient unto death,” might be ultimately and fully accomplished, and that a closer connection might be maintained and encouraged with him as the author of our salvation, it was made a part of his prerogative to

dispense to us, from his throne of majesty on high, every individual blessing of his purchase.

All this took place in conformity to the wise and gracious counsel of God. He "set forth" his own Son as "a propitiation for our sins." When this propitiatory sacrifice had been offered up, he received Jesus into heaven, and "gave him glory" by making him "head over all things" for the benefit of "the church." And he now directs our attention to him, as the source from which we are to derive whatever is requisite for our deliverance and our happiness.

The things which Christ, acting in the twofold capacity of a Prince and a Saviour, is here said to confer upon us, are Repentance and the Forgiveness of Sins.

Now, there are some persons who would object to this phraseology as unsound, if it were not the phraseology of Holy Writ; and even with that authority for its sanction, they can with difficulty be reconciled to it. It appears to them to savour too much of legalism, both because it is repentance—not faith—with which the forgiveness of sins stands connected, and because in the statement of the two things, repentance is placed first in order. But, not to mention the absurdity of supposing that, in the very record from which we derive all our ideas and knowledge of orthodox doctrine, there should be any thing of an opposite description, it will be seen

from a very short examination of the passage, that here, as every where else, the grace of the Gospel and the authority of the law are equally recognised, and that there is not the slightest sacrifice of the one of these divine dispensations to the other.

I. Repentance and forgiveness of sins are here employed, to denote the whole extent of that salvation which Christ has effected in our behalf.

Forgiveness of sins denotes it as applied to our *condition*. We are in a state of guilt—liable to God's displeasure, and under a sentence of condemnation. But Christ by "suffering, the just for the unjust," procures for us "redemption, even the forgiveness of sins." And thus, the only thing which separated between God and us being effectually removed, we are restored to his favour, and regain a title to every blessing which, in the exercise of that favour, he may be expected to bestow upon those who are the objects of it. In this view, and on this account, forgiveness comprehends our deliverance from all the penal consequences of transgression, and our attainment of all the happiness which, by that transgression, we had forfeited, or which may be looked for from the new and merciful constitution under which the Gospel has placed us.

And as forgiveness of sins signifies the whole of that salvation which Christ has wrought out

for us, in reference to our *condition*, so repentance signifies the whole of that salvation which he has wrought out for us, in reference to our *character*. A change of character was as essentially requisite for us as a change of condition. Though pardon and eternal life had been procured for us, yet these we could not have enjoyed, so long as we were alienated in affection and in conduct from God, by whom that pardon was to be granted, and with whom that eternal life was to be spent. And accordingly, provision is made in the Gospel scheme for producing the revolution in our moral nature which is thus found to be not merely useful but indispensable. Of this revolution Christ is the author, as he is of every other benefit that is derived from the plan of redemption. And though consisting of a variety of parts, it is all one connected and indivisible process, which, in the language of my text, is comprehended under the term Repentance, and through the medium of that term intimates that the sinner, from being an "enemy to God in his mind and by wicked works," has been brought to renounce his enmity to him, and to become a willing, obedient, and devoted servant.

In this way our salvation is complete. Having our sins forgiven, the happiness of heaven is secured—the gate of heaven is thrown open to us. And having undergone that thorough change of heart and life, which is the just interpretation of

repentance, we are qualified for admission into heaven, and for a full and everlasting participation of its joys.

The circumstance that faith is not here particularly specified, or that it is not made use of instead of repentance, does not amount to any thing like an underrating of the value of faith, or a depriving it of its just province in the economy of the Gospel. Repentance, in the view we have taken of it, and as explained by the record which God has given us, includes faith, not only as one of its component parts, but as its leading, prominent, most essential feature. The grace of faith, whether considered simply as a belief in the divine testimony respecting Christ, or understood to be an actual embracing of him, and trusting in him, as the appointed Redeemer, stands in the very foreground—enters into the very substance—constitutes the very peculiarity and distinction, of that great moral renovation which passes upon us when we truly repent. Thus it is clearly in the case before us. It is the “repentance of Israel” that is especially spoken of. Now observe how the Jews had acted. They had despised, rejected, crucified Christ—having taken offence at him because, in his character, and situation, and fate, he did not correspond with the deliverer whom their carnal minds had fancied and expected. This formed the essence and aggravation of their sinfulness.

When they repented, therefore, their repentance must necessarily have had a paramount reference to this ; and have mainly consisted in a transition from the obstinate infidelity in which they were living, to the exercise of that faith by which they accepted of Jesus of Nazareth as a suffering Saviour, and depended upon him in that capacity, for pardon and salvation. In like manner the predominant and overruling sin of such, within the pale of Christendom, as have not yet repented, is that Christ has been offered to them, and that they have refused the offer. So that when they repent,—as repent they must, or perish,—the great thing they have to do is to open their ears and their hearts to the message which the Gospel brings them concerning the Saviour, and “to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them,” in the divine person and finished work of Christ. And even in the case of those whom the sound of the Gospel has never previously reached, the same thing obtains ; for they also must repent—and their repentance means their return to that God, from whom it is their characteristic, as fallen creatures, that they have apostatized and are estranged, and this return implies at its very outset, and all along its course, a simple and cordial reliance upon the divinely instituted Mediator, as being essential to the movement which they are understood to be making back to God,—as forming a constituent part

of it—as the very thing which, so far as the penitent is concerned, makes it answerable to its destined purpose.

Repentance, then, as used by the Apostle, does neither exclude the operation of faith, nor cast it at all into the shade. On the contrary, it involves that as its master principle, and leaves it to occupy its proper place. Faith might have been employed with perfect propriety, and must, in that case, have been understood in the same large sense, in order to make the doctrine here stated consistent and complete. But repentance is a term of more appropriate application, because it is naturally and scripturally of more comprehensive import. It signifies—not any one principle or grace—but the whole of that change which a sinner must undergo in his character so that he may be saved, and supposes the possession of every principle and every grace which he is required to have,—these principles and graces holding that relative station, and exercising that particular office, which are assigned to them by the Author of the Gospel dispensation.

II. That this statement of the Apostle is in no way and in no degree derogatory to the grace of the Gospel, will appear from what we have to observe in the *second* place, namely, that though repentance is first in order, it does not bear to forgiveness of sins the relation of cause to effect,

and is not to be considered as the condition on account of which the forgiveness of sins is to be obtained.

Were there nothing in the passage itself to indicate that there is no such connection between the two things, or were it so ambiguous in its phraseology as to admit of that interpretation, still we should be entitled to explain it by attending to the nature of repentance and of forgiveness severally, as these are represented in the Holy Bible,—from which it would be seen that repentance cannot meritoriously contribute to the attainment of any blessing from God; and we should be entitled to explain it also by attending to the general analogy of Scripture, one of whose great objects seems to be, to strip all human moralities, however useful or however excellent they may be deemed, of every thing like good desert in the sight of heaven, and of every thing like efficacy in cancelling the guilt of man.

But we have no occasion to wander from the very text we are discoursing on, in order to be satisfied that though repentance stands before forgiveness, it is not for the sake of our repentance that forgiveness is bestowed upon us. Forgiveness comes to us from divine mercy,—so it is here asserted. Christ is exalted to give it. And, represented as his gift, it is not at the same time either by express statement, or by indirect implication, traced to repentance as its collateral,

subordinate, or conditional source. Nay, the very juxta-position of the two benefits, accompanied, though it is, with a priority in point of announcement being given to repentance, serves to put them on the same footing, rather than to establish any such difference between them, as that the one could be said to take its rise in the other. They are thus placed together that they may be referred to a common origin. Repentance is here declared to be just as much a gift as forgiveness of sins is, and forgiveness of sins as much a gift as repentance is. They are both said to be imparted by Christ in the exercise of his sovereignty, without any other mutual dependance than what proceeds from their being united in the administration of divine grace, and in the treatment of reclaimed sinners. Christ was exalted for this very end, that he might not only pardon sinners, but also renew and sanctify them. And if repentance is a communication from Christ—the fruit of his purchase—the bestowment of his grace, in the same sense that forgiveness is to be reckoned so, does not this exclude altogether the idea of forgiveness being earned or deserved by repentance? Does it not virtually prohibit us from attaching any merit whatsoever to the change that is effected in our character, more than to the change that is effected in our condition? And by teaching us to assign the whole of our salvation—even what we must be-

come in our moral feelings and conduct, no less than in our judicial status before the tribunal of God—to the achievement of Christ, and to his achievement alone, does it not discountenance and discourage every feeling of confidence in our own performances, and bid us cherish as profound humility, in respect to our need of repentance, as in respect to our need of forgiveness? Supposing them to be inseparably united, and so united that in the language which Peter used on a previous occasion, we must “repent and be converted that our sins may be blotted out,” still their union as here described, by resolving them both, and equally, and altogether into a free gift, interdicts every measure of expectation, that we shall get the latter, because we have done the former. We must have the forgiveness of our sins, otherwise we shall inevitably and eternally perish. But we must not demand that necessary blessing as a right which cannot be justly withheld from us; we must ask it as a privilege to which we have no independent title, and according to God’s plan of salvation, we must look to Jesus Christ as its exclusive author. And be it that we cannot be forgiven unless we repent, which is a great and revealed truth, there is here no ground for self-righteousness; for when we set about the acquisition of this grace, we are instructed at the outset, and it never ceases to be a lesson of the Holy Ghost, that we cannot

repent of ourselves,—that this is not a work to which our energies are adequate,—that for its beginning, its progress, its accomplishment, we must have recourse to the Saviour,—that it is Christ's prerogative to restore us from the death of trespasses and sins, as much and as entirely, as it is his prerogative to restore us from the death of guilt and condemnation,—and that if we do not apply for it, and if we do not receive it, as the result of his undertaking, and as the operation of his saving grace and princely might, it never can be ours, and we must live and die in impenitence.

If, therefore, we be guided by what is declared in my text on this vital point, so far from being high-minded as to our repentance any more than as to our forgiveness, we will simply regard ourselves as the mere undeserving recipients of both. We may recognise the distinction, that while the one is bestowed upon us, the other is wrought in us; but still for neither of them will we feel indebted to any virtue or efficiency of our own. Regarding each in its own peculiar light, and in its own proper connection, we will yet ascribe each to that cause which lies far above the resources of human power, and seek for it in him who is the sole fountain of whatever is needful for all the departments of man's salvation. We will say to the Redeemer, "Grant us the forgiveness of our sins, for thy great name's sake:

and as we cannot obtain or enjoy forgiveness except we repent—as it is essential that we be revolutionized in our moral nature, as well as justified before God—we beseech thee to grant us this also out of the abundance of those benefits which, by thy merit alone, thou hast secured for ruined and helpless transgressors. It is our shame and our misery that we are guilty and depraved, beyond any power of our own whereby we can either escape from condemnation, or turn ourselves to him from whom we have revolted. But it is our comfort that thou art ‘exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins.’ And we come unto thee, under the conviction of our own utter insufficiency, and in the faith of thy perfect fulness of grace and strength, that thou mayest convert us, and pardon us, and take to thyself the honour of all our salvation.”

III. But although it appears from the very language of the text, that grace reigns and must be submitted to throughout the whole process of our redemption, it should never be forgotten that repentance is indissolubly linked with forgiveness, and that unless the first is wrought in us, most certainly the second is not conveyed to us.

It is of great consequence to attend to this, not only because the thing is so, but also because men are very apt to neglect it in practice. The fear

of hell, which accompanies the consciousness of transgression, is felt to be so awful and overwhelming, that they are desirous to escape from it. The hope of heaven, which is natural to them as beings who long for happiness and rest, is felt to be so consoling and delightful that they willingly entertain it. And as the Gospel proposes to their consideration and belief a plan, whose tendency is to deliver from the fear of hell, and to encourage the hope of heaven, and as the Gospel has the aspect and reputation of coming from God, they accept of it and cleave to it in their own way with steadfast attachment, and cherish the confident expectation that, through divine mercy, all will be well with them at last—that they shall be pardoned, and acquitted, and made eternally blessed. But all this while they have overlooked that moral change which must be accomplished upon them, according to the will of Him who devised the scheme of human salvation, and according to the work of Him who executed it, and according to the office of Him who is appointed to apply it—that moral change without which future punishment cannot possibly be shunned, and without which future felicity cannot possibly be reached. They overlook this, and they go on to live as if the Gospel had said nothing at all, or had said nothing explicitly and decidedly, on the necessity of repentance, but just allowed them to act as they

please, and yet to reckon assuredly on ultimate safety and happiness.

Now it requires no elaborate train of argument—it requires no lengthened deduction of particulars—it requires no minute exhibition of texts, to demonstrate the utter groundlessness, absurdity, and danger of all such views. However superficially acquainted with our Bible we may be, there is not one of us but must know this much at least, that “God commandeth all men every where to repent”—that Christ has said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all perish”—and that, with all the rich mercy which it unfolds, the Gospel record gives no person the slightest ground to hope for salvation, if the exhortation to repent is neglected or despised by him. And don’t you perceive, my friends, that this disregard of what is so plainly taught and so easily understood—this indulgence in the expectation of final redemption, while living in impenitence—this confidence that God will take sinners to himself at last, though they are refusing to walk in the way by which he proposes to conduct them to his presence—don’t you perceive that all this is itself a proof most ample and conclusive, more ample and conclusive than any thing else, that repentance is to them absolutely essential? They are so much in love with sin—so profoundly enamoured of its gratifications—so firmly determined to persevere in its ways—that they not

only cherish the prospect of going into heaven, though unprepared for it, but resolutely shut out from their view all that the God of heaven has told them of the necessity of a moral renovation, and deliberately rest upon the grace he has manifested, and on the promises he has given, while they as deliberately maintain the character with which that grace and these promises are declared by him to be completely irreconcilable, and neither pray nor labour for the character of which they are necessarily productive, and with which they stand in immediate and everlasting connection. This shows that sin has entire dominion over their inner man—that they are depraved beyond ordinary measure—and that if any need to be reminded of the chain that binds repentance to forgiveness, and that never can be broken, they above all others need to have this set before them in the clearest light, and pressed upon their attention in the most energetic terms.

Wherefore, I would say to all such, look to this declaration of the Apostle Peter, in which he is telling the people of Israel, and through them telling all the people of the earth, what the salvation of the Gospel consists in, and what they must be, and what they must do, in order that they may become partakers of the life and immortality which it has brought to light. Repentance is specially mentioned. It is as emphatically announced as forgiveness. It is honoured

by having conferred upon it the precedence to forgiveness. At any rate, so closely are the two conjoined that you cannot look upon either without seeing both. And when you read the passage, before you can come to the blessing of forgiveness, you must recognise the virtue of repentance. Well, then, you go off in joy and triumph with the forgiveness which is here set forth, as if you had received every thing that is indispensable for time and for eternity ! But why do you leave repentance behind you, which is here set forth with the same explicitness and the same prominence ? The divine authority stamps importance and necessity upon each of them ; and they are placed side by side, that to neither may you feel yourselves at liberty to cherish indifference, and that your being mindful of the one may secure your being mindful of the other. And if it is the sanction of God's appointment which gives you a warrant to appropriate any part of the salvation that is provided, is it not clear that by taking only what is most agreeable to your own inclinations, you are destroying, so far as you yourselves are concerned, the efficacy of the whole scheme, and not only foregoing what he has ordained in adaptation to your moral circumstances, but by wilfully foregoing that, rendering null and void every thing else which you may have thought proper to select, as sufficient for the supply of your spiritual wants ?

And besides this, consider repentance and forgiveness as proceeding alike from Christ. Tracing them to their source, they are found to converge in him. He died to purchase them—he is exalted to communicate them. And could this have been the case, unless both of them had been necessary for you? If both of them are thus demonstrated to be necessary for you, upon what principle consistent with duty or with safety, can you be contented with only one of them? Are not you, in rejecting the other, doing what you can at once to frustrate the Saviour's sufferings on the cross, and to dishonour the power which he exercises, the mercy which he manifests, on his throne? And how then can you for a moment flatter yourselves, that any of your trespasses shall be forgiven while you continue strangers to penitence, or fail to see that, acting upon such an unscriptural supposition, you are only aggravating your sinfulness, and increasing the urgency that is upon you to repent of it?

No longer, then, delude yourselves with the vain, unhallowed, presumptuous, destructive notion that you can obtain the forgiveness of your sins, either here or hereafter, though you remain in that "gall of bitterness," and in those "bonds of iniquity," which impenitence implies. Let the proclamation, that Christ is "exalted to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins," banish all that ruinous folly for ever from your

minds. And while it teaches you with so much distinctness the necessity of repentance, let it also encourage you to undergo that change, to exercise that grace. For though you have no strength in yourselves adequate to the attainment of it, yet "Christ is your strength," and you will find him both able and willing to effectuate in you and upon you whatever the true penitent is required to have. He is willing, for he died that he might save you, and "turn you away from your iniquities." He is able, for he is invested with mediatorial power to confer the blessings of his mediatorial purchase. And, therefore, we bid you come to him in the belief that, according to your heart's desire, he will grant unto you repentance, as freely and as fully as he will grant unto you the forgiveness of your sins.

It may be, however, that some of you will go as far wrong as to the nature and extent of the repentance which is exercised. How many are there who acknowledge that repentance is necessary for them, and that without it they neither can nor do expect forgiveness, and moreover flatter themselves that they have repented, and have, therefore, nothing to fear; but who, notwithstanding this, exhibit such a conduct, and hold such sentiments, as indicate that they have yet much to learn and much to do, before they can be justly ranked among those to whom Christ has

given repentance and the forgiveness of sins! There are two leading radical defects, with which they are chargeable.

First, Their repentance is not of the requisite dimensions—so to speak. It is a sort of external reformation—having no alliance with evangelical motives—and as partial in the acts of self-denial, or of positive obedience, by which it is manifested, as it is worldly, or selfish, or otherwise imperfect, in its originating principles. Now we have seen that the repentance here spoken of, stands for the whole of that character, which the Gospel is intended to form in those who are partakers of its great salvation. It comprehends every step, from first to last, of that mighty revolution in our nature, our dispositions, and our doings, which God requires of his fallen offspring, and for accomplishing which, the Son of God is “exalted as a Prince and a Saviour.” And in order to ascertain the length, and breadth, and heighth, and depth of that, we must carefully consider all that is forbidden, and all that is commanded, in the divine word. And thence we learn, that both as to heart and character, the change is spiritual, thorough, pervading; including all the powers and susceptibilities of the mind, and issuing in cordial, unreserved, unceasing devotedness to the will of the holy and redeeming God. It is such a change on the whole man, as comes up in reality, and in

some good measure, to what is represented by the strong and expressive similitudes of a transition from darkness to light—of being born again—of a new creation—of a resurrection from the dead. And surely, when we take this into account, and consider all the delineations which Scripture gives us of that holy and heavenly deportment by which those are distinguished who are interested in Christ's redemption, it must be evident at one glance, that the persons to whom we refer, are satisfied with what is repentance in name only, or in the language of the world, and have not exercised that repentance which the Gospel speaks of as holding an indestructible relation to the forgiveness of sins.

And *secondly*, as they have not studied to have it in all its prescribed extent, so they have not sought it from Christ, and regarded it sufficiently as an unmerited gift. They have endeavoured to work it out as if it could, either wholly, or in a large degree, result from their own efforts. And they have built upon it some portion of that hope which they entertain of pardon and salvation. Though their repentance were as perfect as it ought to be, even that could not justify such views of it, but would rather prove that divine agency had achieved what they thus gloried in. The truth is, however, that it is defective and insufficient, because they have been leaning on their own wisdom and their own

strength. They have forgotten that every good and perfect gift proceeds from him who is exalted as their Prince and their Saviour. They have forgotten that, in the very constitution of repentance, there is that faith which renounces all confidence in self, and applies to the Redeemer for every thing that is needed. They have forgotten that the sinner, in returning to God, has no other resource than the grace and power of Him in whom, for the well-being of sinners, "it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell." They have forgotten that Christ reigns at the right hand of the majesty on high, that he may *give repentance* and the forgiveness of sins. And forgetting these things, they have neglected the merciful appointments of God, by trusting in which they would have wanted nothing, and have confided in their own devices, which partaking of their own pride, and of their own corruption, and of their own weakness, have deceived them with "a name to live while they are dead," and with a hope which must perish in the day of the Lord.

Let me intreat sinners to lay these things to heart, and to seek for their salvation, and for all their salvation, in the instituted way, and in no other. And as we would encourage them to seek for it in that way, by holding out Jesus Christ as exalted to confer upon them whatsoever the goodness of God has provided, and to effectuate in them whatsoever the will of God demands, that

they may be finally saved, and for ever happy—so “we would persuade them by the terrors of the Lord”—beseeching them to remember that he who is “exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give them repentance and the forgiveness of sins,” will punish them at length “with everlasting destruction, if they know not God,” in this the time of their merciful visitation, “and obey not the Gospel of his Son.”

And let believers rejoice and be comforted that they have such an all-sufficient Saviour to rely upon—that he has wherewithal to minister to every necessity, and to fulfil every desire—that they are “complete in him,” seeing he is “made of God unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption”—and that as he will wash them from all their guilt in his atoning blood, and deliver them from the power of all their iniquities by his grace and spirit, so from the throne where he now sits and reigns to dispense these blessings he will come at last, to introduce them into that region of purity and peace, which he has secured for them, and in which it will be their purchased privilege to abide eternally.

SERMON II.

THE SACRIFICES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

PSALM iv. 5.

Offer the Sacrifices of Righteousness, and put your Trust in the Lord.

WERE this exhortation addressed to beings in a state of innocence, it would have a meaning very different from what it must bear as addressed to beings, such as we are, who have fallen from that state. In the former case it would not only be taken in its strictest sense, but in that sense it would intimate an obligation which there was a complete ability to fulfil. And the beings to whom it referred would be expected to give an immediate response to it in the continued, and unlimited, and cheerful devotedness both of their affections and their doings to the holy will of God, and in the unhesitating confidence that these, by reason of their own intrinsic excellence, would experience his favourable notice and be followed by his just reward. But in the latter case it can neither have such an import nor such an effect. We feel it to be utterly impossible for us to com-

ply with its full demands. Though bound, as the subjects of God's moral government, to do and to be every thing which his law requires, yet in point of fact, we have no power to render such a perfect obedience. Our righteousness, in its best form and in its highest degree, comes far short of what our Almighty Ruler has prescribed to us as the subjects of his moral government. All the purest and most unexceptionable sacrifices of it that we can offer to him are mixed with failings and polluted by sin. And therefore, any trust that we could repose in him, in consequence of these, and on account of them, would be entirely groundless, and would necessarily end in bitter disappointment. We deny not that the burden of the law still lies upon us; and that if we cannot bear this burden by conforming to the precepts which the law enjoins, we must bear it by suffering the punishment which the law denounces. We only affirm that, taking the language of the text in its most rigid meaning—estimating our sacrifices of righteousness by the perfect rule originally given to us—and remembering that God cannot receive any thing less valuable, without violating the faithfulness, and compromising the purity of his character,—we have no sacrifices of righteousness to offer to him which will justify us in expecting that, for the sake of these, we shall regain and enjoy any of those blessings which his goodness ever

prompts him to bestow upon his rational offspring, as constituting at once their honour and their happiness.

Still, however, we are commanded to offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and in connection with our observance of this command, we are encouraged to trust in the Lord. The two things must, of course, be perfectly consistent; and it must be quite practicable for us, fallen though we be, to do both the one and the other. This consistency and this practicability are brought about by the dispensation of the Gospel, which places us, not under the law, but under grace—which makes ample provision at once for the authority of the former and the manifestation of the latter—which renders it competent for us to do homage to the divine will, in such a manner as, without detracting from the divine glory, to become partakers of the divine mercy. And in this view, I shall now endeavour to illustrate the counsel given in my text, which says, “Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.”

I. In the *first* place, offer the sacrifices of righteousness, by cherishing those sentiments of humility and sorrow which become creatures who have lost their righteousness; and trust in the Lord, that if you do so, he will comfort you, and lift you up.

Humility and sorrow, it is true, cannot compensate for the want of righteousness. They amount to a recognition of that want. And are, therefore, in every case in which they truly exist, accompanied with the conviction and acknowledgment that condemnation is not only deserved, but unavoidable, if the sinner is abandoned to his own resources. The man who perceives, in his humility and sorrow, any thing like a substitute for positive or for perfect holiness, and who would rest upon such feelings as the foundation of hope, either sadly mistakes the nature of holiness, or presumptuously and absurdly arrogates to his confession of sin the merit of cancelling the sin which is confessed. On both suppositions, so far from offering a sacrifice of righteousness to the God whom he has offended, he is acting as if he thought "that God was altogether such a one as himself," and his law more flexible and accommodating than the laws of men.

But humility and sorrow answer the purpose which we assign them, as being a heartfelt testimony on the part of the transgressor to the infinite excellence of God's law, and to the fitness, the importance, and the necessity of that obedience which it demands. Supposing these sentiments to be spiritual and genuine, then you are humble and sorrowful on account of sin—not because sin exposes you to disgrace, or subjects

you to punishment in the eye and at the hand of men—not because it is attended with reproach and inconvenience and suffering—not for any reason of this kind—all such reasons being destitute of any relation to the character or to the law of God, and consequently such as are altogether without the sphere of true religion—but because, by your sins, you insulted God's perfections, opposed his sovereign will, defaced that image of himself which he had impressed upon your souls, departed from the path in which he appointed you to walk, as the path of safety and felicity, and contributed your part to that system of rebellion against his government which is not only presumptuous and profligate in itself, but which provokes his holiest indignation, tends to obscure his glory, and goes directly to involve the whole moral world in guilt, degradation, and ruin.

Now your humility and sorrow, originating in these views and cherished by them, amount to a distinct confession that God's "law is holy, just, and good"—that unlimited submission to it was your truest honour, your bounden duty, your only real interest,—that if God inflicts punishment upon you for having transgressed it, he inflicts upon you no more than his justice dictates as due to your demerit,—that if you escape punishment, it must be owing to the exercise of his undeserved mercy,—and, that as you ought never

to have rebelled against him, so you can never experience comfort till the guilt of your rebellion is cancelled, and till the spirit of your rebellion is subdued. And in all this there is a tribute paid to the authority of God,—the only tribute, indeed, of a personal nature, which it is possible for you to pay, in reference to your past conduct, and one which is equally becoming and essential to the situation in which you stand as responsible and guilty creatures. Nor is it merely right in itself, and suitable to your condition,—it is what God himself demands of you. While, in Scripture, he is represented, on the one hand, as regarding with displeasure those who are proud and happy amidst all their transgressions of his law, he is also represented, on the other hand, as looking with satisfaction on such as are abased and contrite under a sense of their sinfulness, and as positively requiring of them that they shall humble themselves in his presence and be filled with sorrow, on account of their iniquities.

And what abundant reason, my friends, have you to offer this sacrifice to God! It would have been your indispensable duty to offer it, even had you been chargeable with but one act of disobedience to his will. But when you consider how numerous and aggravated your offences against him have been,—how long, and how far you have wandered from the paths of his com-

mandments,—how contentedly you have lived in a state of alienation and of distance from him—how frequently you have resisted the tenderest and the most urgent of his invitations to return to him,—how indifferent you have been to the manifestation of his wondrous love in Jesus Christ, and to the blessings of that redemption which he has provided for you in the Gospel, and to the endearing obligations which this lays upon you to “serve him with a perfect heart”—say if you should not lie down in the very dust of humility before him, and wish that your “eyes were water, and your head a fountain of tears, that you might weep day and night” for the trespasses that you have trespassed against him. And if any thing more than these recollections were necessary to excite in you such emotions, I might bid you look to the death of Christ, and contemplate, in the bitterness of that death, as appointed of God and endured by his dear Son, the folly, the turpitude, the ruinous consequences of that guilt of yours, which it was appointed and endured to expiate, and learn from that the depth of lowliness and of sorrow into which it becomes you to sink, when in the capacity of sinners you approach the divine presence.

But, presenting this sacrifice of righteousness, you need not be afraid of your offering being rejected or disdained. God has told you, in his word, that he is well pleased with it. And he

speaks of it in such terms as to give you the assurance that he will graciously accept of it, and as entitles us, when we exhort you to offer it, to add with confidence, that you may “put your trust in the Lord.” He will not accept of it, indeed, as any satisfaction to his offended justice; and truly, if humility and sorrow on account of sin have any real place in your hearts, such a purpose will never enter into your view, because it would indicate those ideas of your own demerit and of God’s law which are most inconsistent with the frame of spirit you are supposed to possess, and which cannot co-exist with it in any sober mind. But he will accept of it as that obeisance which a guilty creature is bound to render to his offended Maker, and as a token of your willingness and resolution to lay down the weapons of rebellion, and to be reconciled to him in his appointed way. And looking on you in the face of him whom he has “set forth as a propitiation for your sins,” he will fulfil all the precious promises that he has made to those who come to him, mourning and borne down under the pressure of conscious sinfulness. “Humble yourselves,” and he will exalt you to that place in his favour from which you have fallen, but to which his mercy in the Gospel has again taught you to aspire. Mourn for your transgressions, and ye shall be comforted “with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” Offer “the sacrifice

of a broken and a contrite spirit," and, far from despising it, he will condescend to receive it with every token of kindness, and bestow upon you, who bring it to him in the name of Christ, every expression of redeeming love, and of paternal bounty, which your hearts can wish, or which your necessities require.

II. In the *second* place, offer to God the sacrifices of righteousness, by a believing application to the obedience of Christ, as constituting that righteousness for the sake of which God justifies the ungodly ; and trust in the Lord that he will "receive you graciously," and "love you freely."

Our humility, however deep, and our sorrow, however sincere, come far short of what God's law requires of us. And so, indeed, must all the best affections, and all the worthiest doings, of which we are capable. Our attempts to keep the whole law may be made in good earnest, and made with the most persevering diligence ; but our experience, as well as our Bible, tells us that they are without success. Our regrets for their failure and their fruitlessness may be as cordial and poignant as we could desire them to be ; but these can never make up for the want of that holiness, by the want of which they are engendered, and of the want of which they form an explicit acknowledgment. And even supposing, that to heartfelt and ingenuous compunction on

account of our past misconduct we could add a sinless obedience for all the time of our probation that is yet to come, still we are sinners, and the curse of the law lies upon us, unremoved and unrepealed. We have broken that law. It puts forth its high and unrelaxed demands upon us. These demands must be, in some way or other, satisfied. And it can only be in consequence of this satisfaction being made, that we can be delivered from condemnation and all the other evils to which, as transgressors, we are justly subject. But to talk of any thing that we now feel, or that we can hereafter do, being adequate to such an effect, is to speak the language of error and delusion. All the tears of penitential sorrow that we can shed are unable to obliterate one particle of the guilt we have contracted : and all the good deeds we can perform are mixed with so much imperfection and sin, as to be utterly destitute of merit in the sight of him who “ is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity.” Even in the case of real Christians, these are the fruits of divine grace, and they are made acceptable by a virtue that is not their own. What must be our condition, then, independently of such aid ! How sinful, how helpless, how hopeless, and how miserable !

We are aware, indeed, that this doctrine is excluded from the creed of many. But we are not trying to accommodate our statements to any

particular creed, as we are affirming what is taught in that "form of sound words" delivered to us by those who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." We propound the doctrine of Scripture in saying, that all the obedience we can render is destitute of good desert when we seek for pardon and acceptance at the hand of the infinitely holy God,—that, in the language of the Bible, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" in his pure and heart-searching eye, and that they "do fade away as a leaf" before the blast of his rebuke, when we offer them as entitling us to ask from him the forgiveness and the favour that we need. And those who are bold enough to depend upon their own merit, are deluded by imperfect and erroneous views both of the character and of the law of Him to whom they are accountable, and proudly refuse to be instructed by his own word, which, while it includes them under sin, declares them at the same time to be "without the strength" which can obtain justification for ungodly men.

But though we have no righteousness of our own that we can lay upon God's altar, as an oblation on account of which we may ask and expect his forgiveness and his favour, still the language of the text may be with propriety addressed to us; and being exhorted to offer the sacrifice of righteousness, we can comply with the exhortation, and trust in the Lord that he will

accept of it as sufficient to justify us. It is the grand object of the gospel dispensation to provide for us that righteousness of which we are naturally destitute, but which, nevertheless, the holiness and immutability of God's law render absolutely necessary. This provision has been amply made by divine wisdom, which has appointed Christ to be our surety and our substitute, and to fulfil in our stead the requirements of a perfect and violated law, by suffering its penalty, and by obeying its precepts. This suffering and this obedience constituted his grand work as our Saviour. That work was of God's appointment. The Son of God accomplished it. It stands in the record of heaven as the ground on which alone a sinner can be justified and saved. And Christ is held out to us, in the revelation of God's mercy, as "the Lord our righteousness," and as "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Now in what manner does the righteousness of Christ become ours, so that we may offer it as a sacrifice to God, and trust in him that, for its sake, he will forgive and bless us? It is appropriated by faith. No doubt its efficacy in our behalf is all to be ascribed to the grace of God. His grace originated it, as the procuring cause of salvation. His grace accepted of it, as sufficient to answer its destined purpose. And his grace imputes it to us, as that in consideration of which

we are personally and individually redeemed. But it is by faith that we for our part lay hold of it, and acquire an interest in it, and become possessors of it—by that faith which implies a renunciation of all dependence on our own inherent righteousness, and rests entirely on Christ's imputed righteousness as the instituted method of justification. Hence the justification which results from that righteousness is said to belong only to them who believe ; and hence also that righteousness itself is not only called “ the righteousness of God,” as being of his appointment, but also “ the righteousness which is of God *by faith*,” as the principle by which the sinner cleaves to it, and clothes himself with it as with a garment.

And we offer to God the sacrifice of this righteousness when we direct our views to it, and place our confidence in it, as the ground of our acceptance with him, and as the meritorious cause of all the blessings that we expect or receive from him. We offer it when, repenting of our alienation from him, and anxious to become his redeemed people, we return to him through the mediation of Jesus, and rely upon that mediation for a gracious reception. We offer it when, supplicating from him the forgiveness of our offences, we plead upon the value of that atonement which Christ made when he “ humbled himself and became obedient unto the death of the cross.” We offer it when, in asking any spiritual benefit that we

need for our comfort or our improvement, we enforce our petition by reference to that Saviour whom he ordained to "fulfil all righteousness," and by that righteousness to become the author of a complete and eternal salvation. We offer it when, in anticipating the happiness of heaven, we make our anticipations of that happiness to depend, not upon any virtues or accomplishments of our own, but solely upon the virtues and accomplishments of Him who was "made under the law," and by his compliance with all its requisitions, regained and secured for us a title to its celestial rewards. We offer it when, in approaching God in any of the private exercises or public ordinances of religion, we look for the communications of his grace and favour, of which these are the consecrated channels, because Christ by his perfect doing of the divine will has made the divine presence accessible to us, and effected reconciliation between us and that great Being with whom it is our purchased privilege to hold spiritual and devotional intercourse. We offer it, in short, when, in thinking of God, or in applying to him, or in casting the burden of our temporal cares and of our everlasting interests upon him, we presume not to cherish confidence towards him, or to count upon expressions of mercy or of friendship from him, except through the obedience of that all-sufficient Saviour who "magnified his law, and made it honourable," and ren-

dered it consistent with all his perfections and all his glory to be propitious to sinful men; and when, in relying with unwavering and unlimited affiance on the infinite deservings of that obedience, our prayers for spiritual good are as large as is the liberality of him to whom we pray, and as is the merit of him in whose name we pray, and we ask not merely to the half but to the whole of that kingdom both of grace and of glory, which was given to our mighty Redeemer as the well-earned recompence of his doings and of his death.

And surely my friends, if we thus offer the sacrifice of Christ's righteousness, we may trust in the Lord that he will accept of it, and accept of it so as that it may procure for us all that we stand in need of. It meets with countenance from every attribute of his character, and from every declaration of his word. We can have no fear that his Wisdom will find it defective; for it is the method of reconciliation which his wisdom devised, and must therefore be perfect in all its arrangements and in all its adaptations. We cannot apprehend any contrariety in it to the decisions of his Justice; for it was wrought out by one who was "holy, and harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners," who "always did those things that pleased" the Father, and to whose labours and sufferings, as our surety, God gave the testimony of his high and

unqualified approbation. We have no reason to suppose that it will fail to derive from his Mercy all that it was intended to secure ; for it had its origin in his mercy, and was appointed just that his mercy might be warranted in expatiating with unrestricted freedom on all the wants and miseries of our condition. And we cannot suppose that its efficacy will be impaired by any failure of his Faithfulness. It is itself a fulfilment of the promises which he made at the beginning, and which he repeated in every successive age of the church ; it is therefore a pledge that he will perform all that he has spoken of good to his people, as well as a security for the honour of his character, and of his administration in lavishing the blessings of salvation on his fallen offspring ; and it furnishes us with a plea, when supplicating an interest in these blessings, which it is for the glory of his name to sustain in every case in which it is preferred in sincerity and faith.

Wherefore let us take encouragement to offer this sacrifice of righteousness—having full assurance that God will regard it with unmingled complacency, and that for its sake he will “ be gracious to us,” and “ cause his face to shine upon us,” and make us glad with “ the joys of his salvation.” Let us offer it continually—seeing that we continually need the favour of God, that never for a moment have we any thing of our

own that we can worthily or hopefully present to him, and that with “the Holy One and the Just,” in whom we believe, he is “ever well pleased.” Let us admire the mercy that prompted, and the wisdom that contrived a scheme of redemption such as that in which God is “just and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” And, in the exercise of a firm and lively faith, let us offer up the sacrifice of that righteousness which secured such a glorious triumph to the divine mercy, and such a great salvation to the hopeless sinner, and trust in the Lord with all our heart that for its sake we shall receive from “the fulness of the Godhead” every thing that our souls can desire or need—pardoning love, sanctifying grace, guidance through life, victory at death, and after all the toils and troubles of this world are over with us, “the fulness of joy which is” in God’s presence, and the “pleasures which are at his right hand,” and last “for evermore.”

III. In the *third* place, offer the sacrifices of righteousness, by an earnest desire and uniform endeavour to be adorned with the graces of personal righteousness; and trust in the Lord that you shall be successful in the good work, and that it will redound to your eternal advantage.

Although it is fruitless, and worse than fruitless, to seek for justification “by the deeds of the law”—although in that point of view all our mo-

ral attainments are mean and inadequate, unacceptable to God, and unworthy of our own confidence—although when directed to such a purpose, the most perfect character we can ever reach in this world would involve us in a sentence of condemnation—yet personal righteousness is absolutely, and in every case, indispensable. This is a doctrine of which the scriptures are full. It is taught in every page of them—in every truth which they reveal, in every fact which they record, in every precept which they inculcate; and he must have read them with little attention, or with strange perversity, who does not see that, according to their peremptory statement, the cultivation of personal righteousness is no less essential to us than faith in the righteousness of Christ.

To obtain pardon, indeed, and the other blessings of salvation, you must look to the Gospel, and look to it as a dispensation of mercy; but no dispensation of mercy, however rich and free, can possibly exempt the moral creatures of God from the obligations of duty and obedience. These are not created by the enactments of an arbitrary authority, which may as easily annihilate, as it at first established them. They arise from the nature which God has given us, from the capacities with which he has endowed us, from the relations in which he has placed us; and so long as we continue to be rational and

accountable beings, they are as certain and unchangeable as are the perfections and character of the great lawgiver himself. And though our apostacy has brought us, indeed, into different circumstances from those in which we were originally situated, yet the transgression that is past cannot make future transgression less culpable than it essentially is ; our criminal want of conformity to the divine will cannot render that conformity less binding on our conscience and our conduct ; and if it be of the nature of guilt to be unpardonable except by the operation of a system of grace, then that grace, while it saves us, must exactly in proportion to its greatness, redouble and increase our weight of obligation to be " holy in all manner of conversation." Accordingly, the Gospel, which is full of compassion to our fallen race, and provides for our recovery by means from which our own exertions are excluded as worthless and unavailing, never assumes the power of dispensing with our personal obedience, and never breathes an insinuation that can give the slightest countenance to any such idea. On the contrary, it is evidently its whole design and tendency to restore us to that holiness from which we have departed, to strengthen the ties by which we are bound to cultivate it, and at once to stimulate and to enable us to make those efforts which are essential to its acquirement. If Christ suffered to cancel

our guilt and purchase our forgiveness, he also suffered to rescue us from the bondage and the pollution of sin, and to “purify us as a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” If he fulfilled the whole law that he might satisfy its demands upon us, and deliver us from its curse, he has also presented that law to us as a rule of life, and set us the example of submission to its authority, and enforced submission to it by new and constraining motives. If it is one of the fruits of his interposition to procure for us the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not only appointed to bring us by faith to an interest in the Redeemer’s righteousness, but has it also as one important part of his office to regenerate our hearts, to sanctify our character, to lead and guide us in the path of duty. If by his “buying us with a price, we are not our own” but God’s, it is that “we may glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits;” and “herein is he glorified that we bear much fruit.” If he has directed our views and expectations to heaven as the abode which he has secured and is now preparing for our everlasting inhabitation, he at the same time assures us, that we must seek for it by purity of mind and “by a patient continuance in well doing,” and has liberally furnished us with all the means that may be requisite to make us meet for its exercises and its felicity.

But it is unnecessary to dwell on this subject. Whatever you may be in practice, you cannot entertain a doubt of the necessity of personal holiness—as being suitable to the whole spirit and design of the Gospel, and as being expressly and absolutely demanded of all who would enter into life. And to such of you as truly believe—to such of you as have “fled for refuge to the hope set before you,” have “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” and are experiencing any portion of that peace and joy which result from faith in the Saviour, and a sense of God’s pardoning mercy—to such of you I address a truth which is familiar and experimental, when I say that you must be holy. You have not only read this as a doctrine of your Bible, and given to it the full and unhesitating assent of your understanding—you have not only such a firm conviction of its reality as that you would reproach yourselves for any degree of indifference to it ; but you have actually realized it in your feelings, and exhibited it in your conduct, as inseparably connected, and intimately interwoven, with all your views of the salvation of the Gospel. And from the first moment that with your heart you embraced the doctrine of reconciliation by the sufferings and obedience of Christ, you have felt yourselves constrained by the influence of that doctrine to present your souls and “your bodies as a living sacrifice to God,” and to “walk be-

fore him in righteousness and holiness all the days of your lives.”

As to those who offer no such sacrifices—who are still living in sin, and conforming to the world, and breaking the commandments of God, whenever interest tempts or pleasure allures, they may believe as they will, and they may hope as they will, but their belief is unsound and their hope is without foundation; and so long as they withhold from God the obedience that he requires, they may be assured that they are strangers to the salvation which he has promised. And let them remember, that as without personal holiness they have and can have no evidence of their being partakers of redemption, so the only security they can have for personal holiness, is to be found in their cordial reception of that message from heaven, which bids them withdraw all confidence from themselves, and look simply, and earnestly, and continually, to the crucified Jesus, as “all their salvation and all their desire.”

But to you who have thus looked, and are thus “looking to Jesus,” when I address the exhortation of the text, I address an exhortation with which you have already complied—with which you are daily complying—with which you know and feel that you must never cease to comply. Conscience, indeed, will tell you of many imperfections in the sacrifices of righteousness which you offer—in the spirit with which you offer them,

and in the extent to which you offer them. But this must not, and it will not, discourage you. It will lead you to the blood of sprinkling for pardon, and it will send you to the Holy Spirit for sanctification : But it will not alter your resolution, it will not weaken your desire, it will not relax your endeavours, to be conformed to the image, the character, and the will of him who has “ called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” You will still “ offer your offering in righteousness.” You will recollect that it “ is your reasonable service”—that it is a service which duty requires you to perform—that it is a service to which you are drawn, and to which you are bound, by the cords of redeeming love—that it is a service by which you are to glorify God and to promote your own comfort—that it is a service not less necessary and essential in its own place and for its own purpose, than that which you offer, when you present the sacrifice of your faith in the justifying righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And recollecting these things, and alive to their constraining influence, you will strive and pray that your offering may be *cheerful*—not given with any degree of reluctance, but given with the full consent of your mind, and in the full current of your affections ;—that it may be *unreserved*, not marked by partiality for any sin, or by aversion to any duty, but including every fa-

culty of your understanding, every susceptibility of your heart, every department and every action of your life;—and that it may be *constant*, not yielded for a season and then withdrawn, but yielded every day, every hour, and every moment, as that which admits of no cessation, whose perpetuity is required by every thing that can promote your honour and your well-being, and which, as it is intended to prepare you for heaven, can only terminate in heaven, and can only terminate there, by assuming the character of un-mixed perfection, and wearing the honours of a blessed immortality.

Thus offering the sacrifices of righteousness, you may trust in the Lord that your offering shall not be in vain. God will look upon it with approbation and with pleasure, as resulting from faith in his own Son, as presented in obedience to his own will, as conducive to the manifestation of his own glory. He will accept of it, because it is perfumed with the incense of Christ's merit, and sanctified by the influences of the Divine Spirit, and presented in the name of one whom he "heareth always." He will reward the piety, and the sincerity, and the ardent desires after righteousness with which it is associated, and by which it is prompted, and his reward shall be an advancement in that holiness which is the object of pursuit, and increased communications of that grace which is necessary for fol-

lowing and attaining it. He will connect with it an abundance of that inward peace and animating hope, which submission to the divine law is, in its own nature, and at all times, calculated to produce and to foster. He will bless it for the general advantage of his church and of the world, by rendering it effectual for counteracting the prevalence of ungodliness and vice, for testifying to the purity and the truth of the Gospel, and for stirring up the disciples of Christ to more diligence and more ardour in the service of their Divine Master. And he will at last crown it with a great and glorious recompense; a recompense proportioned, indeed, to your attainments in devout and holy living, but flowing from the love of the Father, and purchased by the merit of his Son, and, therefore, too great and too glorious to be estimated by your loftiest conceptions, till your faith be turned into vision, and your hope into enjoyment,—till you shall see with your own eyes, that scene of happiness which eternity shall unfold to the view, and put on that crown of righteousness and glory which fadeth not away.

My Christian friends, you are in a more particular manner called upon to offer this sacrifice of righteousness, when you come into God's house. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart."

And when you come here, you are supposed to come in the faith that you shall be accepted of Him whom you profess to worship, for the sake of that Saviour who died, that by his blood he might deliver your consciences from the burden of dead works, and dispose and qualify you for "serving the living God." And as it was sin which occasioned all the shame and agony of that death, and as that death was endured for the express purpose of saving you from the punishment and the power of sin, and making you holy unto the Lord your God, you cannot rightly or consistently approach him, in a dependence upon its merits, without stirring up your souls to a more decided hatred of sin, a more vigorous resistance to its temptations, a more fixed and unqualified determination to keep yourselves from its pollutions, and to "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." And see what encouragement you have to come forward with the oblation of this holiness. Christ died for you, that your persons and your services might be accepted of God; and approaching God as in "Christ reconciling you to himself," you may cherish the comfortable hope, that for his sake he will "receive you graciously and love you freely," and put all your self-denials, and all your pious affections, and all your good purposes, and all your virtuous endeavours, into that book of remembrance which shall be to his believing and

obedient people the book of life. And when you remember that grace of his which sent Jesus to suffer for your sake, let that grace and those sufferings which you thus remember, open your eyes still more to the evil of sin and to "the beauty of holiness," and determine you more than ever to consecrate yourselves to the service of him who has redeemed you to God, and redeemed you for heaven. And while you think of "Christ and him crucified," as holding out a most affecting testimony against disobedience, and a most powerful motive to every thing that is "lovely, and pure, and of good report," let your anticipations also stretch forward to his second coming, that by the hope of meeting him in glory, you may be animated to pursue with renewed ardour and unwearied perseverance, that "path of righteousness" which leads to heaven and immortality.

SERMON III.

THE SACRIFICES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

PSALM IV. 5.

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.

IN discoursing on these words, we proposed to enforce the exhortation which they give, in reference to several particulars. In the *first* place, offer the sacrifices of righteousness, by cherishing those sentiments of humility and sorrow, which become creatures who have lost their righteousness; and put your trust in the Lord, that he will comfort you and lift you up. In the *second* place, offer the sacrifices of righteousness, by a believing application to the obedience of Christ, as that righteousness for the sake of which God justifies the ungodly; and put your trust in the Lord that he will forgive your trespasses, and bestow upon you all the other blessings of salvation. In the *third* place, offer the sacrifices of righteousness by an earnest desire and a uniform endeavour to be adorned with

the graces of personal holiness; and put your trust in the Lord, that you shall be successful in the good work, and that it will redound to your eternal advantage.

IV. And we now exhort you, in the *fourth* and *last* place, to offer the sacrifices of righteousness, by striving to promote the interests of righteousness among your fellow-men; and put your trust in the Lord, that he will bless your efforts, and make them effectual for accomplishing that important object.

No doubt our primary and principal concern is to be holy ourselves. And if this be neglected, or but indifferently attended to, it is quite evident that nothing which we can offer to God, in the way of advancing the holiness of others, can either be of any value in itself, or in any measure acceptable to Him. We should never forget that the requisition to be holy comes to us directly and individually, and that if obedience to this requisition be postponed for the sake of any foreign object, we not merely put that last which God has wisely put first, but at once indispose and disqualify ourselves for doing, with adequate zeal and effect, the very thing which we profess a desire to accomplish. If we are so regardless of what we owe to God, as to refuse or to delay giving him the tribute of our own obedience, it is not to be supposed—or rather it is impos-

sible, that we shall feel much ardour, or display much activity, in securing that tribute to him on the part of our brethren.

But though it is clear, that our main business is to have ourselves holy in all manner of conversation, it is equally clear, that if we be sincere in that work, we will be anxious that our neighbours shall be holy in the same manner, and to the same extent, and will make every exertion that may be requisite for attaining that end. A hatred of sin and a love of righteousness are essential to the truly righteous character. These are the principles which go to form it, and without which no righteousness that we might otherwise pretend to, could "exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees." But how could we be said to have a real hatred of sin, if we saw it reigning in the world around us, and yet did nothing to destroy or to circumscribe its dominion? And how could we be said to have a real love of righteousness, if we saw it generally set at nought or trampled under foot, and yet used no means for regaining to it its legitimate influence, and its absolute supremacy, over the hearts and lives of mankind? All this would unequivocally show, that whatever might be the regard for holiness which we professed, or by which we believed ourselves to be actuated, we were undoubtedly destitute of its fundamental principles—its animating sentiments,

and, therefore, had yet to offer the sacrifices of our own personal righteousness.

And as our labours to promote holiness among our brethren, are thus, independently of every other consideration, necessarily and essentially connected with a righteous character on our own part, by flowing from the very same source which produces it, so we cannot withhold these labours, without being guilty of a direct act of rebellion against the authority of God. It is his commandment that mankind shall, in spirit and in practice, conform to the precepts of his law, and abound in the moral excellencies which it recommends and enjoins. And that commandment is not to be viewed in an insulated light, as if it had no meaning, and no application beyond the individuals to whom it is more immediately addressed, and whom it lays under direct and immediate obligation to be holy. It is a commandment which, if not announced in the hearing, is yet intended for the instruction, of us all. It looks to us as linked together by the ties of mutual dependence, and bound to aid one another in whatever is right and dutiful. It implies our adoption of every method by which we may all be disposed and enabled to render, in its fullest measure, the submission which is required. And, therefore, from the very circumstances in which we are placed under the government of God, it is incumbent upon every one of us to help his bre-

thren to be holy—to discourage in them whatever is contrary, and to countenance and aid them in whatever is agreeable, to the divine will. He is, therefore, himself an unrighteous man who does not promote the interests of righteousness in the world, inasmuch as he does not acquiesce in the arrangements which God has made for that purpose, and co-operate in the good work in which it is the obvious design of Providence, and consequently one part of the import of the law, that he should seriously and diligently engage.

Besides this, it is to be remembered, that we are not left to the strength of a mere inference. The inference, indeed, is unquestionably sound, and is of sufficient force to determine every good man to comply with the exhortation which we have deduced from the text. But we cannot read the word of God with any degree of care, and not perceive in the whole tenor of it, and in many of its particular maxims and precepts, a distinct and explicit obligation laid upon us to aim at the suppression of sin, and at the prosperity of virtue, among our fellow-creatures. So that if this be not our deliberate and habitual aim, we are just as presumptuously disobeying God, and denying to him the sacrifices of righteousness, as if, in our own persons, we were violating any of the injunctions of the moral law. Nay, when duly considered, our disobedience in the former case is more aggravated than it is in

the latter case. In the latter case, the effects of disobedience are confined to ourselves. We disobey; and supposing the worst consequences to take place, we perish, but without involving others in our ruin. Whereas, in the former case, not only do we ourselves suffer for our disobedience, but, by allowing our fellow-men to continue in disobedience, when we might have been instrumental in rescuing them from it, we are also accessory to that destruction by which it is the decision of the law that they, being transgressors, must be overwhelmed. And it is frightful to think how far this aggravation may extend. Its extent, indeed, cannot be accurately ascertained. But we know that it is commensurate with the means which we possessed for turning men to righteousness, and preventing them from forsaking it, but which we neglected to employ at all, or did not employ with that zeal and assiduity which the peculiar importance and exigencies of the case required. It is, therefore, indispensable for our being righteous, in our own persons, that we also endeavour to prevail upon our fellow-men to be righteous—to live in the exercise of holy affections, and in the cultivation of holy habits.

But there is another view of the subject which leads to the same conclusion, and enforces the same duty. We are expressly enjoined to do good to all,—to lessen their sufferings,—to ad-

vance their welfare and happiness. This object we are required to have continually in our eye, and to pursue with unabated ardour. And if we are not distinguished by such charity, we are nothing, as Christians,—we are strangers to the spirit of the Gospel,—we have not in us the mind which was in Jesus, and walk not as he walked.

Now we can conceive no plan more conducive to the welfare and felicity of the world than that which proposes to rescue it from the influence of moral depravity, and to diffuse among its inhabitants the admiration and the desire of moral excellence. Is it not undeniable, that sin is the baneful and certain source of the ten thousand times ten thousand evils which afflict its dwellings and its people? Must it not necessarily be, that the curse of God shall accompany rebellion against his will, and that where his curse abideth, there can abide no prosperity and no comfort? Can it be that he should deny his blessing,—the blessing that reaches the heart, and fills it with tranquillity and joy,—to those who set themselves to conform to his holy and perfect will? Has not he himself told us, that “there is no peace to the wicked;” and that they are happy who “fear his name,” and who “hearken to his voice,” and “keep his commandments?” And is not every day’s observation sufficient to convince us, that we shall in vain attempt to banish misery from the earth, and to impress upon it

any resemblance to paradise, so long as men will persevere in the abominable thing which God hates, and which first brought death into the world with all our woe? And should not these considerations lead us to promote the interests of genuine righteousness, by striving with all our might to give it a higher and more commanding ascendancy over the minds of men than it has ever yet possessed,—by persuading them to renounce “every false and wicked way,” and to become “a willing and obedient people” to the Lord their God?

You may apply what remedies and what palliatives you please to the temporal evils of men,—you may contribute largely and liberally to their worldly prosperity,—you may give them health for sickness, and riches for poverty; but you have consulted neither their true honour nor their substantial good, if you have permitted them to remain “far from God and far from righteousness”—strangers to that moral purity which preserves the heart that it adorns from many a pang, and disobedient to those commandments, “in the keeping of which there is a great reward.” And even though they should be so free from sorrow, as to have no calamities in their life, and “no bands in their death,” still are they not, like yourselves, formed for eternity; and if your sympathy and kindness for them be the sympathy and kindness of Christianity, will it not be their condition in

that eternity which shall principally awaken these sentiments in their behalf? And know ye not that, while all their earthly joys and griefs shall die with their mortal bodies, there are joys of which they shall partake, or there are griefs which they shall endure, for ever and ever,—that these shall severally depend on the conduct which they have maintained here as the subjects of Almighty God,—that if they have “kept the commandments” they shall “enter in through the gate into the city,” and “eat of the fruit of the tree of life,”—and that if they have disobeyed the Gospel, they “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?” And surely if your minds are actuated by true, enlightened, Christian benevolence towards your fellow-men,—by that benevolence which looks to their present comfort, and to their immortal retribution, you must feel the necessity of every day offering up the sacrifices of righteousness, and putting forth your energies, and improving your opportunities, for “bringing the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,” and “building up the saints” of God in their holy faith, and in their holy practice.

Again, you acknowledge your obligations to promote the glory of God. It was for this you were created; and if you have any love to him who made you—any high sense of his perfec-

tions—any reverence for his character and his government—any exalted views of the homage which is owing to him from his universe—it will be your grand concern to promote it, and in every thing you do, you will have a single eye, a paramount respect to it. You will remember the rule that is given you in Scripture, which says, that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, you must do all to the glory of God.” And if, in every thing—in the most common place transactions of life—the divine glory is to be a ruling principle of conduct, how important must it be that you act upon this principle in those high concerns which more immediately affect the moral administration of God! Surely, then, you cannot be insensible to the conduct of mankind in reference to his holy law, which is just a transcript of his attributes, and which is given to mankind that, in their obedience to it, the excellence of these attributes may be manifested, and he to whom they belong be acknowledged as worthy of all dominion and of all praise. And you must perceive that unless righteousness characterize his rational creatures, such manifestation does not take place—such acknowledgment is not made. By sinning against God, dishonour is cast upon his perfections and his authority. And all the effects which his law was intended to produce upon the character and condition of men, as illustrative of his divine and supreme excellence, are either

thwarted or destroyed. But, on the other hand, when submission to his will is unreservedly and universally given,—when transgression is avoided or when transgressors repent, and when all the virtues of the heart are carefully cherished, and all the duties of life faithfully performed, in compliance with the rule which he has laid down for the regulation of men's minds and actions,—then is respect exhibited to every one of the attributes of God ; the harmony which subsists among them is visibly demonstrated ; and in the moral beauty which is displayed, and in the unmingled happiness which is felt, there is seen such a manifestation of the presence, and operations, and infinitude of the Deity, as makes his intelligent creation burst into one song of blessing and praise “ to him who sitteth upon the throne ” and “ reigneth for ever and ever.” And would you contribute to this result ; would you bear your part in this sublime and rapturous anthem—in elevating its strains, and in teaching men to sing it with a loftier spirit and a nobler voice ? Then teach them to be holy. Do not rest satisfied with the sacrifices of personal righteousness, offered by yourselves and on your own account ; these indeed are necessary, they are absolutely necessary, and must not be neglected ; but see that every man also who comes within the reach of your counsel and your influence engage in the same service—that he erect an altar

in his heart and in his home, and on that altar present his tribute of holy affections and holy deportment—that he bow implicitly to the sceptre of Him who is “the King of kings, and the Lord of Lords”—that he reflect in his own character, though it be imperfectly and dimly, the uncreated excellence with which the divine character is adorned—that he deny himself to every indulgence and every deed which might question it, or bring reproach upon it, in the eye of one human being—and that he abound in all “the works of righteousness that are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

I have still another consideration to press upon you, in relation to the subject I am speaking of. You know that Christ died as a Saviour. You believe that his death is intended to deliver from the power as well as from the penalty of sin. And as he died “to redeem you from your iniquity,” unquestionably you must admit your individual obligation to deny yourselves to the love and the practice of iniquity, and to consecrate your lives to the obedience of God’s law. But you do not think, surely, that this benefit of his death was limited to you ; and that the whole purpose of his mission and his sacrifice will be answered, if you present offerings of righteousness for yourselves. Recollect that the “Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the Devil,” in whatever part of the earth these had

got a footing—that he is “the Saviour of the world”—that in him, as to the sanctifying ends of his incarnation, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free”—that if his blood were allowed to operate all the effect which it is competent, and which it was shed to produce, it would not merely cleanse from sin the hearts of those believers to whom it is already applied, but would achieve the same deliverance for many who are still in “the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” And, recollecting these things, can you be indifferent to the prevalence of “ungodliness and unrighteousness among men,” without being chargeable with indifference to the grace and the merits of that death which is contemplated as the object of your own faith, and the foundation of your own hope? Can you coolly and inactively regard the rebellion against God, which is so openly and so universally carried on by the multitudes that are around you, and yet flatter yourselves that you have an interest in the redemption purchased by the sufferings of Christ, who suffered that by the power of his cross he might subdue the men of every kindred, and tongue, and people under heaven, and bring them under the dominion of their celestial king? No, my friends, it cannot be. You behold in the death of Christ the wisdom, and the mercy, and the purity that were combined, to emancipate you from the de-

gradation of sin, and to “make you priests unto God.” And if your beholding is that of a believing eye, then it follows, of course, that, after looking to Christ in this light and in this manner, you will go to your homes and into the world, to offer the spiritual sacrifices of pure hearts and of holy lives to Him, for whose service you have been purchased at such a costly price. And it is to be presumed, that you will never forget, and never violate, your obligations to devote your souls and your bodies on the temple of God’s sovereignty, and on the altar of cheerful, unqualified obedience. But do not, I beseech you, banish from your view the collateral obligation which is so manifestly imposed on you, and which, by your Christian profession, you have so emphatically recognised, to disseminate that principle of holiness which Christ died to revive and to establish among the fallen race of Adam, and, in this manner, as priests who are concerned for the honour of their God, and for their own consistency, and for the efficacy of that oblation by which they themselves have been consecrated, to increase the number, to inflame the piety, to purify the character, of your fellow-worshippers and your fellow-servants throughout the earth. Rejoice that the Saviour calls upon you to co-operate with him in such a great and holy work as that of emancipating men from the bondage of sin and Satan, of bringing them into the free-

dom of God's children, and of giving to the empire of his law a wider range, and a more commanding sway. And whenever you think with gratitude of Christ having died "to bless you, by turning you away from your iniquities," and give effect to that gratitude by yielding yourselves as a living sacrifice unto God, let that same sentiment of gratitude, spurning from it every feeling of selfishness, and deriving a generous ardour from meditating on the holy and extended purposes of the Redeemer's agony, constrain you to apply your might and your means, whatever they may be, for diminishing the sum of abounding iniquity—for subduing that spirit of resistance to God's authority, which rules so imperiously and so universally in our apostate world—and for making every heart, and every house, and every country, the habitation of that holiness in which God delights, by which he requires us to glorify him upon earth, and by which we are to be prepared for the enjoyment of his presence in heaven.

On the means by which you are to promote this object, or to offer these sacrifices of righteousness, I might discourse to you at great length. But I shall content myself with giving you only a short outline.

And here it must strike you at once, that the grand and efficient means of diffusing righteousness is to be found in the diffusion of Christian-

ity. I speak to those who at least profess to be acquainted with Christianity, and to believe in its divine truth ; and I appeal to you if Christianity be not a system of righteousness ; if the restoration, the establishment, the prevalence of righteousness be not the grand object which it avowedly has in view ; and if in all its provisions, and by all its enactments, it is not directly calculated, and admirably fitted, to accomplish that object in its widest extent. Various other subsidiary instruments may be employed ; but even the efficacy of these is more or less in every case derived from the Gospel, and none can deny that it is the Gospel to which we must look as the great dispensation by which the world is to be regenerated as well as saved,—that if we lay it aside, human kind must be given up to hopeless degeneracy, to endless alienation—and that if it were allowed to have free course and unfettered operation, men would be brought, as far as they can be brought in the present state, from the power of Satan to the obedience of God.—But why should we dwell on a proposition which cannot be disputed, without either betraying great ignorance of the constitution and record of the Gospel, or calling into question the wisdom, and the faithfulness, and the power of him who has revealed it ?

What, then, are we to think of those who, in the face of such a proposition, are indifferent

to the propagation of Christianity—take no part at all in the schemes that are going on for giving it a more extensive spread—hold up to ridicule such of their brethren as engage with any zeal or activity in this good work—and speak and act in such a manner, that if their words and conduct were to take effect, the revelation of God's grace and will would never go one hair-breadth beyond the territory which it now occupies, and never become in the least degree better understood or more influential, among those to whom it is already communicated? Think you, my friends, in the impartial exercise of your judgment and your Christian principles, that these men are sincere in their pretensions to the character of believers, or that they do not speak absurdly, and act worse than absurdly, when they lament the crimes and vices which gives such a hideous aspect to moral society throughout the world, and yet set themselves in scornful and determined opposition to all attempts at removing the obstacles by which the promulgation of the religion of Christ is so much thwarted, and at securing for it a more enlarged reception, and a more thorough obedience, from the nations of the earth? Take care then that you be not among their number,—that you be not tempted by their sneers or their opinions to relax in your endeavours to propagate the Gospel, or to separate yourselves from those who are prosecuting

that enlightened and benevolent object ; but that you make it a part of your Christian vocation, of your Christian work, of your Christian sacrifices, to lend your aid in diffusing “the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent, and whom to know is life eternal.”

This paramount regard to religion which we inculcate, as we have already remarked, is not to be considered as exclusive of any other way whatever, by which the interests of morality may be promoted. Let laws be framed for suppressing crime and profligacy, in every case in which human conduct can be fairly and wisely brought under the cognisance of human authority. Let such measures be adopted by private individuals, or by public associations, as are calculated to lessen the number and the strength of those temptations by which the young, or the unwary, or the ignorant, are so apt to be seduced, and to encourage them to walk steadfastly in the paths of rectitude and virtue. Let intellectual education be so liberally given, and so widely diffused, that the many may be rescued from the dominion of mere sense, that they may have resources for enjoyment of a higher order than worldly or voluptuous gratification, and that their understandings may be so informed as to enable them to discriminate between the right and the wrong, and to recognise the comforts and the advantages of moral worth. Let nothing be omitted which

has a tendency to check the progress and prevalence of corruption on the one hand, and to encourage the preference, and pursuit, and cultivation of goodness on the other; but let every thing be done with zeal and with energy, by which these effects may be severally secured.

Still, however, let Christianity occupy the supreme place in your system of operations for the advancement of righteousness in the world around you. To this place it is entitled from the perfection and purpose of its author, from its own native power to purify the heart and character of all who come within the range of its influence, and from its experienced efficacy in this respect wherever it has been brought to bear, even indirectly, on the principles and passions of fallen humanity. And to this place it is entitled also, from the efficiency which it gives, and which it is its peculiar prerogative to give, by its spirit and by its sanctions, to all the other methods which can be employed for controlling the wayward affections of man, and for guiding him in the path of obedience and duty,—an efficiency which will be felt and manifested exactly in proportion to the degree in which Christianity is combined with the various methods we are supposing to be put in requisition, and to the power of regulating and animating these with which it is invested. Give me the Gospel, and let me go forth with it as it is found in the pure, and quick, and

powerful word of God ; and with this one engine, independently of every other, I will undertake to renovate, and reform, and sanctify the world, as far as that attainment can be reached. And when you bring forward other instruments for effectuating that object, I say that, on the one hand, unless they are authorised by revelation, or conformable to it, little or no benefit can be justly expected from them ; and that, on the other, if they have its sanction, it not only imposes upon you the obligation of using them, but in so far as it is permitted to direct them, and to commingle with them, and to rule over them, will they be found effectual for accomplishing their purpose of making men wiser and better as the subjects of Almighty God.

But while you thus proceed on the faith, that in order to make men righteous, you must have it as your grand and constant aim to bring them under the sway of Christianity, remember that it will not do for you merely to profess friendship to the cause—merely to give it public countenance—merely to watch and assist its progress. This is well enough, so far as it goes ; and it is devoutly to be wished, that there were among us a greater number who felt at all for the moral well-being of their species, and bestirred themselves in any degree for its advancement. But we cannot bid you rest contented with such measured sympathies on the subject, or with such

feeble endeavours to give influence and diffusion to that system which, as Christians, you have espoused. You should strive that you may come short in nothing by which you can defend it, or build it up, or gain for it the standing and the prosperity, which it so justly and so richly deserves. You should think of the inherent excellence by which it is pervaded as a constitution of divine origin—of the difficulties that beset it on every side, and are continually obstructing its operations—of the vast importance of its being successfully brought home to the conviction and experience of those among whom it is promulgated—of the blessed and glorious results that may be anticipated from that unmingled triumph which you are desirous to achieve for it. Think of these things, and exert yourselves for what you must estimate as beyond all price, according to the ability which God in his providence has given you, for promoting the righteousness which is sacred to Him, as it should be precious to his creatures, and for bringing men into an estate of willing subjection to his authority, “through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.”

Remember also, that if you would secure for Christianity its purifying effects in their best style, and in their fullest measure, you must present it to them in its true and native character—not as it has been fashioned to please the taste,

and square with the philosophy, of those who would deprive it of its most striking and most momentous peculiarities, denying in the face of its positive testimony, the divine glories of "the Lord that bought them," and reducing it almost to a mere code of ethics, which, with a little more light, Socrates or Cicero could have composed—but as it has been sent forth of God himself, who in his pity for a ruined world was revealing a plan of redemption adapted to the circumstances of his apostate children, and distinguished by the mysterious manifestations of his own holy and compassionate nature.

Recollect, moreover, that in order to render Christianity efficient as an instrument of sanctification, you must present it to men principally as it is characterized by the doctrine of the cross—as it is a system of divine grace—as it is a message of reconciliation. We hear certain persons applauding its morality, and expressing anxiety that its morality should be chiefly, if not exclusively, urged upon the attention and the practice of all to whom it is addressed. And no doubt it is both right and necessary to teach and enforce, with great earnestness, all that is ethical in the Gospel. But it is a strange and a fatal mistake to suppose that this is sufficient to attain the end in view. God has united the morality with the doctrines of Christianity, and if we separate what God has thus joined together, we destroy the constitution, and defeat

the object of the whole scheme. It is from the grace of the Gospel that the precepts of the Gospel derive their most powerful motives, and their most complete success. It is by the cross that believers have hitherto obtained their victory over the temptations of the world, and over the corruptions of their own hearts, and over the allurements of the wicked one; and none are taught to look for the same victory but those who go to the cross, and account it their salvation and their glory. Keep the peculiar truths of Christianity as a dispensation of pardoning mercy out of view, and you leave it without any interesting import; and without any sanctifying efficacy. Present it in its genuine character; and in your exhibition of it, give the prominency to that which makes it "glad tidings of great joy" to guilty and corrupted man; and you insure for it its highest influences on the heart and conduct of those who give heed to it; you employ the weapons which, according to its own teaching, are "mightiest through God to the pulling down of the strong holds" of sin; and you constrain its votaries to "offer unto God the sacrifices of righteousness," while you teach them to put their trust in his mercy, as manifested in a crucified Redeemer.

But forget not, my friends, while you labour to promote Christianity, as the surest and most efficient method of promoting righteousness among men, to exhibit its purifying influence on your

own deportment. If you lead ungodly, or licentious, or worldly lives, you will become careless of the manner in which other men conduct themselves; and even though you should feel some anxiety for their virtue, and endeavour to secure it by the inculcation of saving truth, all your anxieties and all your endeavours will be frustrated by the practical contradiction which your instructions receive from your demeanour. You will pull down with the one hand more than you can build up with the other. But if you sincerely *love* what is holy, and if you diligently *practise* what is holy, you send along with the Gospel an argument for its truth, which cannot easily be resisted—an illustration of its power, which can scarcely fail to excite admiration and esteem—a recommendation of its excellence, which promises to obtain for it an unchallenged admission both into the understanding and the heart. Be but “living epistles of Christ, to be read of all men;” and in this way you will do more for multiplying the number of penitents, and believers, and righteous men, than all the logic of the schools, and all the declamations of the eloquent, have ever been able to accomplish. Let your light—the light of a holy example—the light of a conversation becoming the Gospel—let this “your light shine before” the world; and those who “see your good works” will “glorify your Father in heaven,” by the humility and the vigour of their faith in

his word, and by the extent and the cheerfulness of their obedience to his law.

Now, my friends, thus offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord, that he will bless your efforts and give them success. Even though you should be disappointed in your anticipations of much fruit, still you have performed your duty—you “have done what you could”—and verily you “shall not lose your reward.” But you may count upon a prosperous issue, inasmuch as you may count upon the wisdom and the faithfulness of God. He has appointed certain means to be employed for effectuating the particular end we have been considering: and beyond all controversy these means, if properly used, and connected with prayer for his efficient energy to accompany them, must be productive of the end for which they were divinely instituted. And then he has given repeated promises that they who labour wisely and conscientiously in this mighty enterprize, shall not find their labour in vain; they shall succeed sooner or later—in one degree or another, in bringing down the reign of iniquity, and leading sinners to acknowledge the authority, and to yield obedience to the law, of that Great Being, who is high, and holy, and everlasting. We may be often mortified and discouraged to see our best instructions, and our most winning examples, frustrated by the perversity, the obduracy, the

determined wickedness, of those for whose reformation we exert ourselves. But there may be good done, though we see it not. The holy purpose may be formed, though it is not to ripen into execution till we have no opportunity of observing it. Impressions of duty may be produced by us, though it will require the aid of others, and the repetition by them of those lessons which we have given, to mature these impressions into a consistent and righteous practice. There may be numerous trophies to the renovating grace of the Spirit, operating through our agency, which will not be known till the judgment of the great day shall reveal them. And O how animating to be assured that, for the divine glory and for the happiness of mankind, many shall be rescued from the captivity of sin, and shall be prepared for the felicities of a future world, by the godliness and the good works in which they have abounded in a present world ! And how delightful to look forward to the period when we shall meet, in the sinless kingdom that is above, those redeemed souls, to whose purification and happiness we had here been instrumental in contributing—when we shall unite with them in the song of unceasing praise to Him, to whom all the honour of our common salvation belongs—and when “they that be wise shall shine as the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever !”

SERMON IV.

THE COMMUNICATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

PSALM lxvi. 16.

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

THERE are three principal points suggested by these words, which it is our intention to illustrate in the sequel of this discourse. In the *first* place, Such as fear God take an interest in his doings to the souls of men, and are those, therefore, to whom Christians will chiefly communicate their experience of the divine mercy. In the *second* place, Those to whose souls God has been gracious are desirous to speak to such persons, of their sense and experience of the mercy God has shown them. And in the *third* place, They have many things that are interesting, important, and useful to declare, as to the workings and effects of that mercy which they have experienced.

I. Such as fear God take an interest in his doings to the souls of men, and are those, there-

fore, to whom Christians will chiefly communicate their experience of the divine mercy.

Those who fear God, have obtained just apprehensions of his character. Their minds have been made alive to its perfection and its glory. And they feel towards Him, as possessing that perfection and glory, the mingled sentiments of love, and reverence, and devotedness. They take delight in thinking of him,—in meditating on his attributes,—in pondering on the works which he has made, on the ways in which he operates and manifests himself, on all the events by which his decrees are fulfilled, and on all the results which follow from his doings, throughout the universe.

But of course they feel a peculiar concern in those expressions of his will, and in those departments of his administration, which relate to the human species, which come very close to their own business and bosoms, and to which, in a particular manner, he has been pleased to call their earnest and devout attention. They must therefore be much occupied with what he does to the souls of men. The soul of man was made at first after his own image—formed so as to show forth his honour, and enjoy his presence for ever. And when it fell from that high and blessed destiny, and became corrupt, and was doomed to destruction, so precious still was it in his regard, that he devised a scheme for its redemption from the mighty evils

into which it had been plunged by its apostacy, and for its restoration to those honours and privileges of which it had been deprived by the award of divine justice. Nay, the value that he set upon it is demonstrated, not only by providing salvation, but by the nature, and circumstances, and execution of the plan which he contrived for its accomplishment. It is a plan in which all his perfections are harmoniously and wonderfully displayed, and which redounds equally to the happiness of his creatures and the glory of his own name. And consequently he who fears God cannot fail to contemplate and to trace it, with lively emotions, both in its general influence on the condition and prospects of mankind at large, and in its benign effects on the temper, the character, and the fate of those individuals in whose welfare he is more immediately concerned, and whose history comes more nearly and directly under his observation.

Now, it is to persons of this description that the Christian will be most disposed to declare God's mercy to his soul. We do not mean that he will not make mention of it to any others. He may find among his fellow creatures occasional instances of inquiring minds and impressive hearts, amidst very mournful alienation from God, and very fixed aversion to divine things, And where he finds a willing or a patient ear, and where the information he has to convey may

be so received as to promise some beneficial result, he will be inclined to speak of his spiritual experience, and bear a testimony to the mercy of his Maker. In such cases, he may discover some susceptibility of serious feeling,—some incipient tokens of good will to religion,—some pleasing signs of sympathy with what he has to communicate respecting the kindness which God has shown him, the change he has undergone, the blessedness of which he is conscious ; and these things will encourage him to divulge as much as there is a capacity for receiving and for bearing, and to speak, with a mixture of delicacy and of earnestness, of the riches and the efficacy of divine love.

Those, however, who are utter strangers to the work of grace in their own souls, will be backward to listen to any tidings concerning his. It will be unintelligible, or unpleasant, or hateful to them, with whatever gentleness and with whatever skill he introduces it. If they are infidel and profane, they will be apt to take occasion from it to “blaspheme the holy name by which he is called.” If they are men of the world, their reputation would be blasted among their associates, were they to be detected in the act of listening to the narrative of his conversion, or of learning from him the exercises of a gracious frame. And were they only decent nominal Christians, he would speak to them in an unknown tongue, or on

a distasteful topic, when he told them of events and emotions in his own case which had no counterpart in theirs, and which practically conveyed warning or reproof, by intimating attainments which they are sensible they had not made, and tokens of heavenly favour which they had neither sought for nor acquired.

But the Christian encounters none of these difficulties and obstacles in addressing those who truly fear God. To them he can speak with freedom, and with safety, and with power. They are as willing to hear, as he can be to declare. Their understandings are already enlightened to see the import and the value of those things about which he makes his communications. Their affections are already so awakened and so moulded as to regard, with more or less satisfaction, whatever good news he has to tell them. They can enter into all his alternations of hope and fear ; they can sympathize with him in all his vicissitudes of joy and sorrow ; and they can fully and feelingly appreciate the worth of every blessing that has been bestowed upon him, the importance of every acquisition that he has been enabled to make, the security of every step which he has been privileged to move forward in his progress towards heaven.

The experimental acquaintance of Christians with spiritual things may, in various respects, be different in different individuals. Some may

have but just learnt and just begun to practise the fear of God. Others may be considerably advanced in the path of righteousness. Others may be comparatively matured in knowledge, faith, godliness, and virtue. But at whatever stage they have arrived in their Christian journey, they all have the same common principles, the same common acquirements, the same common experience of God's merciful dealings with his people. And the least or the most perfect of them may be sure to find in all the rest a state of mind which, in one regard or other, in a greater or less degree, corresponds with his own, and presents an opening into which he may pour with propriety and with effect, whatever attestations he has to give to the bounty and the loving-kindness of his heavenly Father. All that he has to ascertain and be assured of is, that those whom he is to treat as the depositaries of his spiritual secrets—the audience to whom he is to make known what he has tasted of the goodness of the Lord,—are really and sincerely such as fear God in the scriptural sense of that phrase, and that with this fear of God they conjoin the virtue of discretion, and will make no unwise or injurious use of what is confided to them. Those indeed who fear God, will be naturally cautious in saying or doing any thing by which the honour of his name may suffer detriment, or the operations of his grace be misrepresented

and reproached. Even though prudence is not otherwise one of their most predominant qualities, the exercise of it in the respect now alluded to will be continually suggested to them, and enforced upon them, by the consideration that when their pious friends tell them what divine benignity has effected for the welfare of their souls, the glory of their heavenly Father, and the interests of practical religion are no less deeply concerned than the claims of God's children on one another, in holding sacred and inviolate the intercourse of Christian love and Christian brotherhood. Still, however, the very reasons which, in the case of all believers, should lead them to cultivate prudence, will induce you to ascertain its existence in those to whom you are to verify the declaration in the text. And having ascertained this, there is then safety as well as propriety in expressing to them what you have seen, and received, and felt, of God's loving-kindness.

With some of your fellow Christians, from the soundness of their judgment, from the tenderness of their sympathies, from the similarity of their temper and circumstances to your own, you may have more liberty and more encouragement to do this, than with others. And such will be sought out by you, and selected as the individuals with whom your intimacy will be chiefly maintained, and to whom the revelations of your ex-

perience will be most entirely and unreservedly made. But in all of them you will previously seek for those essential qualifications, by which they are fitted to be the recipients of what you have to communicate respecting the Lord's dealings with you, and to whom, therefore, you may freely say with the Psalmist in my text, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

II. Those to whose souls God has been gracious, are desirous to speak to them that fear God, of their sense and experience of the mercy which God has shown them.

Into this desire of the enlightened Christian, there enters nothing like pride, ostentation, or vain glory. At least if any thing of that kind do mingle with his desire, he is sensible that it should not be there ; he guards against it with scrupulous anxiety as an imperfection and a sin ; and he prays that the Holy Spirit may preserve him from such a weakness, and keep him as humble as he ought to be, and make him forget himself in higher and more worthy considerations. Were he to speak of God's kindness in making him a believer, in helping him onward in the work of sanctification, or in imparting to him peace and comfort—were he to speak of God's kindness to him in these respects, as if it conferred some degree of merit upon him, or in order

to gain the respect and admiration of others, this would offend and shock those fearers of God to whom he thus boasted, and would make his declarations sound like impiety in their ears. And were he to speak of God's kindness to him in these respects, without any consciousness of having experienced that kindness as he described it, this would be hypocrisy—a profane affectation of being the object of divine favour, and of living under the influence of divine grace; and though he might conceal it from those on whom he played off his imposition, he would stand condemned by his own conscience, and provoke the heaviest displeasure of Him, with whose name and operations he had thus so solemnly or so wantonly dared to trifle. But the true Christian is *sincere* when he declares what God has done for his soul—he speaks from heart-felt experience. And what he says is not intended to exalt himself—to proclaim his own deserts—to secure the approbation and friendship even of good men. He has better feelings; he takes nobler aims; he is actuated by purer and loftier principles: And when he is solicitous to tell them that fear God, what God has done for his soul, his solicitude to do so is just an emanation from all those elements of faith, and love, and hope, and holiness, which go to constitute the spiritual and substantial character of the true Christian.

If a fellow creature has rescued us from some sore calamity which we either apprehended or were suffering—if a person whom we had grievously offended, and from whom we could look for nothing but resentment and displeasure, has requited us good for evil, and pardoned instead of punishing us—if some one of high wordly distinction has stooped from his greatness, and condescended with the tenderness of a friend, and the humility of an inferior, to minister to our wants and our gratifications—if any individual has generously and disinterestedly contributed to the advancement of our temporal fortunes, and been the main instrument of enabling us to scatter the blessings of comfort and protection and plenty over all our neighbourhoods—in all these cases will there not be awakened within us strong feelings of admiration, and gratitude, and joy ; and if no selfish or sinister interference take place, will not the expression of these feelings find its way to the bosom of our companions, and even be sent forth to reach the public ear, and gratify the public mind ? And if rightly touched by the liberality of our benefactors, and by the value of the gifts which they have bestowed, will not we be sensible of a restless impatience till our spirits have unburdened themselves, by an open and thankful acknowledgment of all that they so strongly feel, and of all that they so justly owe ? This is what almost invariably happens in such circum-

stances as we have supposed, even where religion and religious men are out of the question.

It is, indeed, a natural mode of relieving the mind when affected or filled with big emotions, to express these in appropriate language to such of our friends or fellows as can comprehend and sympathize with them, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” And many such emotions must occasionally spring up in the bosom of the true Christian. When he meditates on the wonders of redeeming love—when he thinks of his own escape from the destruction that he merited—when by faith he realizes the grace and power of the Saviour, and has “peace and joy in believing”—when he feels his lusts and passions subdued by the energies of the Holy Ghost—when he is enabled to resist the temptations that assail him, and can patiently endure his trials and adversities, and triumph on the verge of the gloomy grave, and exult in the hope that is “full of immortality”—in each and all of these circumstances, he must be conscious of affections which it is difficult and painful to suppress ; he will find himself irresistibly impelled to give them verbal utterance ; and he will not be satisfied till he has told and expatiated upon those things which God has accomplished in his behalf, which have laid him under infinite obligations, and which have animated him with a joy that looks to the celestial paradise for its counterpart

and its consummation. And every time that he recollects the mercies which God has poured into his spiritual lot, and every time that he has been blessed with some new gift or fresh deliverance affecting his everlasting well-being, and every time that he can exercise a livelier faith in the Redeemer, and a brighter anticipation of heaven—he will feel his heart full to overflowing, and will be anxious to employ that method of relief to his labouring breast which the Psalmist evidently and eagerly sought when he said, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.”

But while the Christian will thus declare what he has experienced of God’s mercy from the impulse of feeling, he will also do it with the view of honouring that God to whom he is so largely and so richly indebted. He is sensible of his unworthiness of the very least of those benefits which he has received. He knows well that by his own doings he could not have secured even one of them. He is aware that so far as his fellow-men were concerned in the attainment of them, they were but humble, though it might be willing, instruments of promoting his welfare. And it is to God that he looks as the source of what he enjoys,—tracing to him not only his blessings in general, but every individual blessing of the multitude which are descending upon him from time to time—and recognising in them a

wise adaptation of treatment to his peculiar circumstances, a seasonable removal of those difficulties in which he was involved, a faithful performance of the promises on which he had been taught to rely, a manifestation of love equally exuberant and undeserved. Under these impressions, and with these views, he is not contented with a secret conviction of the truth that all his spiritual prosperity is owing to divine interposition, or with the silent tribute of gratitude ascending from his own bosom, or breathed out in his own retirements. He is anxious to let it be known how kindly he has been dealt with by him to whom the whole honour of his salvation, and of every blessing of which it consists, is justly due. And while vain and unenlightened man would be apt to say, "Come and I will tell you what I have done for myself,"—or "Come and I will tell you what my Pastor, my friend, my fellow creature, has done for me," his language is, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what *He* has done for my soul." And while he thus speaks of his obligations to sovereign mercy as the source of all his comforts and of all his hopes, he gives an opportunity to those whom he thus makes acquainted with his happy experience, and stirs them up to the becoming and pious exercise of uniting with him in adoring the character of God, in ascribing to Him whatsoever is precious in his Christian history, and in making it all redound "to the praise of the glory of his grace" in Christ Jesus.

The Christian desires to tell of the divine mercy to him, not only that he may honour God, but also that he may do good to those with whom he thus communicates. Their welfare is dear to him, and he will not fail to advance it when furnished with the means and the opportunities. He knows that practical and experimental statements are well suited to that purpose. He may gratify and improve his brethren by speaking of God's goodness in general, by relating to them the experience of it enjoyed by other individuals, or by giving them abstract lessons on the subject, and illustrating and enforcing these by examples drawn from the annals of Christianity, or from the pages of Christian biography. But their gratification and improvement will be tenfold increased when the case of which he speaks happens to be his,—when it is his own soul which has been partaking of God's mercy,—when this mercy has been exhibited to one with whom they are personally familiar, or to whom they are affectionately attached,—and when they at once hear from him a solemn testimony to the divine goodness, and see in him a visible demonstration of its reality and extent. It is his duty, therefore, as well as his inclination, to unfold to them the comforts and the blessings of his experience as a child of God. He thus contributes purely and greatly to the indulgence of those pious, social, and benevolent feelings by which they are animated ;

and when they learn from him the way in which God has visited him with the joys of his salvation, extricating him from his difficulties,—delivering him out of his temptations and distresses,—directing him “in the path of righteousness” when he could scarcely discern it,—imparting to him the influences of the Spirit when his heart was wandering or dejected,—keeping him strong and steadfast in his faith when it had threatened to fail,—opening up to him fields of holy duty and useful exertion where he had despaired to find them,—giving him increased comfort in ordinances which had been too often a weariness to him,—helping him to see more clearly the wisdom that presides in the darkest dispensations of Providence,—raising up friends for him when he thought himself deserted and desolate,—and brightening those future prospects which were sometimes looking dim and doubtful to the eye of his hope,—when they hear these things from his own lips and in relation to his own fortunes, they see their way more clearly through the wilderness, they put a stronger and more unreserved trust in that God to whom they have committed their fate, they are comforted as to all which has befallen him, they take courage, and rejoice in their march to Sion. Seeing that these beneficial effects will, in some degree or other, flow from the showing forth of his happy experience, no wonder that the true and right-hearted Christian is desirous to tell it to those whom it con-

cerns to hear it. He is only practising that love to his brethren, that regard for their advantage and happiness, by which all the real followers of Jesus are actuated towards each other, when he says with the Psalmist in my text, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

And while gratifying this natural, pious, and benevolent desire, which constrains the believer to declare his experience of the divine mercy to those who fear God, he also cherishes and gratifies the desire as a means of promoting his own spiritual advantage. If he does good to others by such declarations, he puts it in their power to do good to him in return. Not only is his delight enhanced by communication, it is also enhanced by the expressions of reciprocal emotion which it draws forth from those to whom the communication is made. Their comfort is the sweeter, their joy is the more exquisite, that they and he are comforted and rejoice together, over the same blessings, and with mutual and unaffected sympathy. And then the information that he conveys may give occasion for suggestions on their part, from which he may derive edification and profit,—by which they may be the means of imparting strength to his principles and liveliness to his affections,—by which he may be guided in difficulty, and sustained in adversity, and helped forward with surer steps and at a

quicker pace, in the pilgrimage which he is pursuing to the "heavenly country." And being like minded with him, they will be ready to seize the opportunity which he offers for rewarding his confidence and his kindness with those returns of counsel, and consolation, and encouragement, which he has enabled them to give ; so that being thus benefited by those that fear God, in consequence of having opened up to them freely what an unwise and unsocial policy would have buried in secrecy and reserve, he is led to unbosom himself on every future occasion on which his heavenly Father confers upon him any peculiar tokens of favour, by the hope of thereby adding to his own improvement and his own happiness. And influenced by this motive as well as by others, he nourishes and indulges the desire which prompted the invitation in the text, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

III. Lastly, Those who are supposed to hold this language have many things that are interesting, important, and useful, to declare, as to the workings and effects of that mercy which they have experienced from God.

It is not merely those great things which God, as a God of compassion, has done in the eye and for the benefit of the world at large that the Christian is wishful to declare. He delights, indeed,

to contemplate these things—to meditate upon them—to speak of them—and to do so in reference to that wide and expansive scene on which they have been transacted. But he cannot forget that he is personally concerned in them; and it is this personal concern in them, as traced by him in the operations of that God who “worketh all in all,” and who has made him an actual and individual participator of the redemption which has been provided for our race,—it is this personal concern in them, of which he is anxious to inform his brethren who are living in the fear of God, and which both qualifies and induces him to address them in these words, “Come and hear, and I will declare what God has done for my soul.”

No doubt, as I am a sinner, and as God has devised, and revealed, and executed a scheme of salvation for sinners, I am warranted, in one view, to regard that scheme as put forth and accomplished for my benefit; and in that light I may converse about it with others as a subject deserving of devout admiration—as a boon entitled to the highest gratitude and praise—as a marvellous display of the infinite perfection of that great and good Being “who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working,” and of the riches of whose beneficence the heaven and the earth are full. But it is quite possible that with respect to me individually and eventually, it may be without effect, or rather may have no other effect than

that of increasing my condemnation,—in which case I should have nothing to tell, that would find a welcome in the ears of them that feared God, and loved his people. So that it must be brought near to me, and I must become a partaker of its blessings, and be made sensible of their value, and actually enjoy their influence, in order that I may properly use the language of the text.

Could I only state that God is merciful—that in the exercise of his mercy, he has sent a Saviour into the world—that according to his gracious proclamation, whosoever believeth in that Saviour “shall never perish, but shall have everlasting life”—that I have heard of some by whom this proclamation has been received, and to whom it has been carried home with efficacious energy—and that many a heart has it purified, and many a habitation has it cheered, by its holy and comforting influences,—I would state what might be perfectly true and greatly useful, and yet what could not authorise me to adopt the invocation of the Psalmist.

Nay, were I able to go even farther than this, and to speak of the Gospel as something in which I take a personal interest—as a system to which I have a strong attachment—as a religion which has in a certain measure profited me as well as others—yet if I have not received it in the love of it, and have not my “whole man” subject to its power, and have not felt it to be the channel of

those saving benefits which proceed from God as my God ; if I have given a mere speculative assent to it, and have not “believed in it with the heart unto righteousness ;” if I have taken it as a collection of abstract truths, as a narrative of curious facts, as a dry code of ethics, and rejected it as to its regenerating, and sanctifying, and reviving energies; if I have not found it to be the oracle by which the Lord addresses to me “the words of eternal life”—the engine with which he raises me out of “the fearful pit and miry clay,” and “sets my feet upon a rock, and establishes my goings”—the fountain out of which he refreshes my fainting spirits, that I may persevere in my heavenward journey, and “go on my way rejoicing”—if I am thus distant in my regards to the Gospel, and thus a stranger to those important effects of which it is intended to be productive, and which will be realized as to every one to whom it is “the Gospel of the grace of God,” the language of the text could not be used by me with any conscious sincerity, or with any impressive earnestness, or with any practical benefit.

But if I can “speak what I do know, and testify what I have seen,” as having been done to me or for me by the God of my salvation, and as forming passages in my spiritual history which exhibit his loving-kindness, and remind me of my manifold obligations; if I can say that God caused the offer of the Gospel to be made to me when I was

living in carelessness and in sin,—that when I refused to listen, he again and again addressed me by his providence, by his servants, by his ordinances, till my attention was effectually arrested,—that he subdued my proud understanding, and bent my stubborn will, and overturned, one after another, all my “refuges of lies,” till I obeyed his voice and accepted of the Saviour,—that having wrought in me a living faith, he gave me the comfort and the peace which accompany believing,—that he has often enlightened me when I was in darkness, strengthened me when I was weak, “succoured me when I was tempted,” upheld me when I was tried, and cheered me when I was sorrowful,—that he has kept me humble when the light of worldly prosperity was shining bright upon me, and sustained and cheered me in the gloomy hours, and amid the thickening evils, of outward adversity,—that he has converted the most distressing vicissitudes of my lot into the means of purifying my affections and elevating my hopes,—that he has shed tranquillity over my heart when I was troubled and distressed by the malice of my foes,—and that he has so treated me and so dealt with me, as that I can say of his loving-kindness that it has been new to me every morning and every night, and that “great has been his faithfulness”—then I can appropriately employ the language of the Psalmist—employ it in its native import, and in its full signification, and say, “Come and hear,

all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul."

It is impossible to enumerate all the particulars on which the Christian might dwell when detailing his experience to others. Not only is the experience of every individual multifarious, and increasing in variety, as he advances in life; but the experience of every individual differs in many respects from that of others, according to mental constitution, outward circumstances, previous habits, and the operation of sovereign grace. And no one is either able or called upon to give a minute narrative of what he has felt and how he has acted, during every period of his Christian career, or to speak of all the doings of God towards his soul, without discrimination and without reserve. There may even be important events occurring to affect his well-being, important changes taking place in his views, important blessings sent into his lot, all indicative of the divine mercy to him, which it would be indiscreet, indelicate, or injurious, to reveal at the time to all those who fear God, or to reveal at any time to his most intimate and endeared associates. He will only impart what deserves to be made known, and what can be made known with propriety, and safety, and advantage. He will select what is conducive to the honour of God, to the welfare of others, and to his own substantial interests. But

after making every deduction, there is not a real Christian whose experience does not comprehend numerous instances of the kindness and love of God which he would be fully justified in declaring—which he is prompted to declare by all the motives that can legitimately influence him in such a case. From the first moment that he was made to see his danger,—to know the truth,—to enter on the way of life,—down through every successive period of his course, God has followed him with countless manifestations of his grace and favour,—some of them of greater, and others of them of less comparative moment, but each of them contributing, in its place and in its degree, to his spiritual prosperity, and all of them illustrating the inexhaustible kindness of the God and Redeemer whom he serves, and all of them terminating in the celestial consummation of “glory, honour, and immortality.” And therefore, whatever be the nature of his condition, and whatever be the length or the extent of his experience, he can be in no want of topics on which to dilate when announcing his debt of gratitude, and there is no stage of his progress Zionward that he may not draw upon his remembrance of what is most recent, and upon the existing circumstances of his condition for facts, wherewith to follow up the purpose of the invitation which he gives to them that fear God, when he says,

“Come and hear, and I will declare what God has done for my soul.”

My Christian friends, let this conduct of the Psalmist be a model for your imitation. Let not constitutional shyness, or habits of reserve, or want of confidence in others, prevent you from adopting it. Let these interfering causes be counteracted and overcome by a strong sense of the duty you have to discharge, and by a cherished feeling of the obligations that you owe to Him whom you are called to honour, and by a resolute desire to lose no proper occasion of doing good to those with whom you are connected by the ties of friendship and of faith.

I would not have you, indeed, to make your personal religion the subject of common conversation—of idle gossiping—of ostentatious display. Neither would I have you to bring it forward as a topic of regular and indispensable statement, as if its details must be entered into, whether they have their foundation in inward grace and practical experience, or not. All this tends to produce simulation and hypocrisy. It tempts those who are addicted to it, or on whom it is imposed as a task, to substitute feeling for principle, and fancy for fact. And it goes to nourish the belief that piety consists in the ready use of a certain sectarian phraseology, rather than in the consciousness of a heart devoted to God,—that

words and professions are more necessary than those realities in the mind and character, of which they should be the mere and unambiguous signs,—and that the best and most copious talkers on such points are the best and most matured of Christ's disciples. I would have you to put away from you all the formality which this implies, and to guard against all the delusion into which it is so apt to betray you. And I would have you to recollect that experimental religion is a thing of depth, and of substance, and of sincerity ; that some of its most important workings are accompanied with “groanings which cannot be uttered ;” that in its very nature and import, it is abhorrent of all affectation in the modes by which it intimates its existence and its power ; and that if your verbal declarations are not connected with a true and sanctified experience, and are not spontaneous and unconstrained effusions from that source, they are without value in the sight of God, and can have no other effect than that of provoking his displeasure, and deceiving your own souls.

Nay, I must go farther in stating the limitations of which this duty is susceptible. I have witnessed instances in which the Christian has been silent for years on “the things which belonged to his peace,” and on all that had been going on between his Maker and his soul ; in which there was visible and uniform and pleasing

evidence of his having consecrated himself to God and obtained the blessing from on high, without almost a single disclosure of his state of mind to the dearest of his brethren ; and in which it was not till he was about to enter into eternity, that his tongue was loosed to declare to surrounding friends, how compassionately his heavenly Father had rescued him from the delusions of sin, and made the Redeemer precious to his heart,—to show by his intimate acquaintance with divine truth, by the ardent breathings of his piety, by the affectionateness of his address to those from whom he was going to be separated, how much and how closely he had been “ walking with his God,”—to proclaim in glowing diction the victory which his faith, long concealed as it had been under the veil of a timid and unobtrusive temperament, was giving him over the assaults and the terrors of “ the last enemy,”—and to expatiate, in a strain of language that was bold and eloquent as if dictated by inspiration, on those coming glories with which his hopes had been quite familiar, and which he was then privileged to realize as “ ready to be revealed” from heaven. I have also witnessed instances in which even this dying testimony was withheld or not permitted to be declared—in which there were but few words spoken either as to the experience of the past, or the feelings of the present, or the prospects of the future ; but in which there had been a lengthened life, ex-

hibiting in its every feature the most distinct and consistent proofs of devotedness to God and reliance upon Christ; in which no eye could fail to perceive, through the modesty and humility that adorned the whole man, those fruits of the Spirit which demonstrated beyond all controversy that renewal had taken place, and that sanctification had been in progress; and in which the peacefulness of the last hour, viewed as the conclusion of such a holy and heavenly course, left us no room for doubting that we saw a true believer—a saint of God, taking his departure to the regions of bliss, and that we should have been perfectly safe in wishing, had such a wish been lawful, that “our soul had been in his soul’s stead!” And I mention these things to guard you against laying it down as an invariable maxim, that the declaration of his experience is absolutely essential to the real Christian, and making this the test of a filial relationship to God, and of a personal meetness for heaven. Proceeding strictly upon such a principle, you might draw inferences destructive of your own comfort, and form judgments equally groundless and unfavourable as to the state of others. And therefore, it is necessary that you look to those other criterions which the Scripture affords for determining the reality of your spiritual life, and which, while they are altogether indispensable, are at the same time most satisfactory in ascertaining that important fact, and in warranting the consolation which it naturally imparts.

With all these exceptions and cautions, however, it well becomes you to follow the practice of the Psalmist. The degree in which you do so, must depend on circumstances which I cannot detail or specify, and of which you yourselves must judge when they occur. But still let it be a part of your spiritual exercises. And whenever an opportunity presents itself, which you can regard as fit and seasonable, embrace it, that you may declare to them who fear God what he has accomplished in your behalf. You will find comfort and advantage from it. It will afford an evidence of the state of your heart, as the seat and the subject of divine influence. It will help you to glorify the God of all your blessings. It will assist and animate you in the course which you are pursuing as followers of the Lamb. It will prepare you for bearing witness at your dying hour, in behalf of Him who has made "goodness and mercy to follow you all your days," and who will not forsake you in your last agony. And it will be the beginning of that hymn of holy rapture, which you shall join the saints of heaven in singing to his glory and praise throughout the ages of eternity.

And let me beseech such of you as never tell to others what God has done for your souls, because you have no such experience to tell, to think seriously upon your situation. If you had no earthly friend of whose kindness you could

speaking, would not you be desolate and forlorn indeed? If there was not a fellow creature who had ever assisted you in your seasons of adversity, or showed you any token of his good will, or even cast upon you an eye of pity or of kindness, what a comfortless and dreary scene would be that world which, though full of living men, had thus treated you with a death-like coldness and neglect! And how would your spirits sink within you under such total abandonment, even though all that the mightiest and richest of human beings could have done for you, would not have soared above the perishing comforts of the earth, nor stretched beyond the narrow horizon of mortality! O then how utterly deserted must you be, and what loneliness and despair ought you to feel, if you have no mention to make of the mercy of that God, whose mercy is essential to the welfare of all his creatures, and sufficient for them all; or if you can only refer to that mercy of his which has lengthened out to you a day of grace, in whose light, however, you have not walked, and whose advantages you have not improved! If you cannot talk of his saving mercy here, how can you ever hope to enjoy it, or to celebrate it hereafter? If you have nothing to tell of your experience of his bounty, as manifested to you through Christ Jesus, in this scene of trial, and preparation, and hope, how can you expect to meet him with confidence at last when he comes with the

awards of a righteous retribution, or to have an abundant entrance administered to you into the kingdom of his glory? It must needs be in this case that you perish. Not being vessels of mercy, fitted for the master's service in the heavenly temple, you must be vessels of wrath, fitted for the destruction and perdition which await ungodly men.

Do not then, I entreat you, live any longer in your present state of destitution and estrangement from God. Cast yourselves upon his compassion. Be reconciled to him by the death of his Son. Apply to him in that "new and living way," as the sole and inexhaustible fountain of all good. Leave not his throne of grace till you have obtained that "blessing of his which maketh rich, while he addeth no sorrow with it." Wait upon him continually in faith and supplication, that you may receive out of his fulness as "the fulness of the Godhead," all that can contribute to your spiritual life, and all that can prepare you for the life that is eternal. So that cleaving to him, he may be gracious to you, and so crown you with his benefits, that you also may be among the number of those who can say from the heart, and who will say with the Psalmist, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

SERMON V.

JOY FOR TEMPORAL MERCIES.

ACTS VIII. 8.

And there was great joy in that city.

THERE was great joy in the city of Samaria, and the cause of it was two-fold. Philip miraculously cured the diseases of the people, and thus restored health to individuals, and comfort and independence to the families with which they were connected. And he preached Christ, by whose power and in whose name he performed those miracles of healing; he preached him as the promised Messiah, the expected Redeemer. These things,—the miraculous healing, and the preaching of Christ,—were not fruitless. Being accompanied with the divine blessing, they filled the minds of the people with joy,—each of them producing the joy appropriate to itself. There was joy on account of *temporal* mercies, and there was joy on account of *spiritual* mercies. This is what we learn from the narrative where our text lies: and the fact as thus stated

may furnish us with some interesting and useful reflections, to which we will do well to take heed.

I. There was joy on account of temporal mercies.

The circumstances attending the benefits conferred upon the Samaritans, as well as the benefits themselves, would render this joy peculiarly great. For not only were the lame and the palsied made whole, and unclean spirits expelled from those who had been possessed by them, and various other deliverances effected in the case of the distressed ; but all this was done in a supernatural way, so that many hopeless maladies were cured, and the cure in every instance was instantaneous and complete, neither subjecting the patient to any painful operation, nor leaving any portion of the distemper unremoved. None, therefore, who experienced such interpositions could fail to be affected with more than ordinary gladness ; and all who witnessed them, or were in any measure interested in them, from relationship or from neighbourhood, must have participated in the emotion.

And their joy would be still more enhanced by perceiving so clearly that the hand of God was in all this, that it was to his marvellous loving-kindness they owed it, and that they were entitled to consider it as illustrative of the mercy and the power by which he was distinguished, and as laying a foundation on which they might rest their

confidence in Him for future and for higher blessings. These, indeed, seem to have been the pious views which accompanied or were produced by the divine compassion of which they had so largely partaken. For we are told that, in consequence of the miracles which Philip wrought upon them, or among them, and by which they were made recipients of God's bounty, as well as witnesses and monuments of his saving strength, they welcomed the redeeming message which he sent to them, thus recommended and attested, and embraced the faith and hope of the Gospel. And nothing tends more directly to increase to its highest pitch the pleasure that is felt in the reception of temporal benefits, than the act or habit of tracing them to the fountain of all goodness, and the Lord of all might, and thus connecting them with that system of divine care, and divine protection, and divine liberality, under which, when He by whom it is all managed is our friend, we must be perfectly and for ever safe.

Now, brethren, when any blessing connected with a present life, is put into your lot, whether it consist in deliverance from evil, or in the communication of positive good, your hearts will doubtless be affected with joy. And the joy that you feel will be in proportion not only to the native sensibility of your minds, but also to the importance you attach to the evil from which you have been rescued, and to the value that you set

upon the positive good in which you have been made to share. This is so much in accordance with the constitution of your nature, that if you have not such experience in such circumstances, there is evidently some defect or some derangement in your system.

But the great subject of anxiety in this case should be, that while the sources of your joy are such as are warranted by the sanction of God, your joy itself, in whatever degree it exists, or from whatever cause it may flow, shall be worthy of the faculties with which he has endowed you, and of those sentiments, and anticipations, which he has taught you to entertain. When, for instance, you are raised from a bed of sickness and pain, to which you have been long confined, and in which you have seemed to be fast hastening to dissolution; when some dear friend or relative, to whom you had bidden a sad farewell, is brought back from the gates of death: when you are unexpectedly relieved from an existing or an impending embarrassment which threatened to reduce you to naked poverty; when your undertakings succeed, and your fortunes prosper beyond the utmost limits of your expectation; when, in short, any thing that you fear or suffer is removed, or any thing you desire or hope for is obtained,—I need not say that you are joyful—but I may ask, what is the nature of that joy in which you indulge? Is it a mere animal excite-

ment to which you give that name? Is it like the gratification of the brutes, when they are getting their hunger and thirst appeased, or when they are liberated from bodily torture, or from irksome confinement? Or is it the feeling of those utter worldings, who are happy only when their lower appetites are ministered to, and they are permitted to revel in the voluptuousness of the passing hour, or to repose in the lap of undisturbed and idle luxury?

We are afraid that in many cases it is nothing more refined or more dignified than this. But surely such is not the joy which it becomes you to cherish, either as moral beings or as enlightened Christians. That it may be suitable to your being, and worthy of your destiny, it behoves your joy to have a far more elevated tone and character. And for this end, the good that produces it must be associated with views and convictions which awaken sentiments of a nobler and more spiritual kind, and connect whatever you are allowed to partake of with the God that sustains you, and the eternity into which you must speedily go. Those blessings, by your experience of which the emotion has been excited, must be considered as to their origin, as to the dispositions which they intimate on the part of Him from whom they come, and as to the higher purposes which they are designed and fitted to subserve, both in your present and your future con-

dition. It is only when you take this enlarged and comprehensive view of them, that the delight which they are calculated to create and to foster, can be felt by you in its genuine spirit and full extent—in its purest and most generous exercise. In the one case, it is nothing better than a sensation beginning and terminating in the baser part of your nature ; or at the best, it has no wider a range than what is limited by the creatures which are perishing around you, and by the days and the years that are fast fleeting over you. But in the other case, it unites the intellectual and the moral with the merely sensitive—the understanding in its loftiest efforts, and the affections in their purest and most pious movements, with the capacities which are peculiar to your mortal existence, and recognises this combination of the two as the great and copious fountain from which it flows, and by which it is nourished. It is to be traced beyond the immediate object, or the immediate event which produced it—even up to Him in whom all perfection dwells, and by whom all happiness is conferred. It gathers contributions from that scene of duty here, for whose holy labours the benefits that awaken it furnish the opportunities, and motives, and encouragements, and from that scene of immortality hereafter, of whose felicity it is at once an earnest and an antepast, and in which it will become equally exquisite and endless. And thus while its proximate causes

are acknowledged, their power of generating it, and of keeping it alive, is incalculably increased by conjoining with them whatever is excellent in the divine nature, and whatever is desirable in spiritual attainment, and whatever is glorious in the prospect of eternal life, as rendering them fruitful of it, in infinitely greater purity, and in infinitely greater abundance, than it could possibly exist, if divested of such influences and of such associations.

I. You are joyful, and perhaps greatly so, when temporal benefits are conveyed to you. But remember that these are not the fruits of your own independent exertion ; they result not singly or efficiently from the benevolence of your fellow-men ; and far less do they come into your lot by the operation of fate or accident. They are the gifts of God :—sent to you directly in the course of his sovereign providence, or communicated through the instrumentality of others whom he has enabled to befriend you, or procured by his blessing being made to accompany those efforts which you yourselves have been strengthened to put forth for your personal safety and advantage. In every instance, the good that happens to you, be it what it may, is an expression of the divine bounty to which you had no independent title, and which you never could

have succeeded in obtaining without the aid and beneficence of the "Father of mercies."

The kind interpositions which took place in behalf of the people of Samaria were indeed miraculous ; and in that view perhaps were greater, both in value and effect, than any of those with which you have been favoured, and better fitted to lead the mind at once and irresistibly to "the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift." But if you have taken your principles and impressions from the Holy Scriptures, you will not need a miracle, nor even what is uncommon or striking, to lift your contemplation from the mercy in which you rejoice, to him by whom that mercy has been manifested. Every comfort which descends upon you in this vale of tears, you will regard as descending upon you from heaven. Be it great or be it inconsiderable—be it such as would make your neighbours wonder and call you fortunate, or be it such as even some of professed devotion would count less than nothing and vanity—you will recognise in its bestowment the hand of that invisible Parent on high, to whom you owe all that you are, all that you have, and all that you hope for.

And, O ! how sweet and satisfying is that joy which you draw from this believing and pious reference of your every blessing to God ! Were you to be informed that any happy event which

had befallen you originated in the contrivance of an individual, who combined with general worth a strong and disinterested attachment to you, would not this discovery add much to the pleasure arising from the event itself, and from its influence on your wordly condition, by giving birth to sympathies which could not otherwise have existed? And if this individual should turn out to be the Father whom you had done much to displease and alienate, whose home you had deserted, that you might follow your own wayward propensities, and from whom you had no reason to expect any thing but resentment and disinheritance, would not this increase to a still higher degree the enjoyment which you had derived from what was deemed nothing more than an act of warm and unsolicited friendship? And if the boon, whose power of delighting had thus become progressively greater, were to carry in its own bosom, or to be accompanied with, unequivocal evidence, that the Parent from whom it came had melted into pity for his undutiful but repenting children, and that he had sent it as an expression of his relentings for the past, and as a pledge of his affection for the future, can I adequately describe the gladness which, in such circumstances, would pervade your hearts, and animate your language? And must not this be realized in a style which no reciprocity of kindness between man and man can ever exemplify,

and in a degree which no display of mere human generosity can ever create, when you are able to receive all the good things of life as proceeding from the hand of your Father in Heaven, who condescends to care for you, and to supply your wants, and to watch over your safety, with a solicitude which nothing but the yearnings of paternal tenderness could ever dictate ? Conscious of having offended him by ingratitude and disobedience, and of having provoked his displeasure instead of having deserved his kindness, you are consoled with the belief that he has not “ forgotten to be gracious,” but that he is compassionately preserving you for himself, and that, by a minute and continued manifestation of unmerited forbearance and benignity, he is gently leading you back to that state of reconciliation with him, in virtue of which you shall be able to look up in the spirit of adoption, and say, “ Abba, Father.” And if this spirit of adoption already dwells and acts within you, and has filled you with all that love, and confidence, and devotedness which actuate the children of God, who know what is the extent of their privilege, and what “ is the hope of their calling,” then every deliverance from danger or distress that he works out for you, and every addition that he makes to your cup of prosperity, will be a token of that affection which he bears to you as his own ; it will strengthen your conviction that you are the ob-

jects of his unceasing and peculiar care ; it will lead you to meditate with greater intensity and earnestness on those perfections by which his character is endeared to such as put their trust in him ; it will teach and encourage you to expect all the better things which go to constitute, in its truest sense, your well-being as inhabitants of earth ; it will be precious to you as a proof of the same tender and boundless beneficence, which, having guided and guarded you amidst the perils and privations of the wilderness, will translate you at length to the blessedness of the promised land ; and therefore, although it may seem to be of little value or importance when isolated from these considerations, and regarded as to its more immediate effects, yet when connected with that system of divine and merciful administration of which it forms a part, it provides you with a warrant for rejoicing which is as unlimited, as is the love of God, and the hope of immortality.

Nor is it necessary, according to this mode of considering the subject, that you should rejoice, or that your joy should be great, only when the temporal benefits which are imparted to you happen to be important and lasting. The feelings of the worldling are governed by such an estimate ; but not so the feelings of the real—the well instructed—the experienced Christian. Sometimes, indeed, even with the true Christian,

the animal sensibilities are allowed to mingle too freely and too largely with the spiritual, and lead him to doat with excessive fondness on some propitious event of his life, merely because it has been distinguished by what is strange and remarkable, as if the every day provision that is made for his subsistence and his security were unworthy of any notice, or of any acknowledgment. But in proportion as your minds are enlightened to see the finger of God in whatever contributes to your preservation and your comfort, and habituated to the workings of that filial piety which traces and ascribes every boon you receive to the favour with which he regards you as those whom he has pitied and redeemed, will your joy be regulated, not by the greatness of the prosperity which gives occasion for it, but by the divine bounty which it indicates, whether it be great or small.

The Samaritans, in regard to God, were ignorant, torpid, and unconcerned, and needed that the ordinary course of his government should be broken in upon by miracles, in order to rouse them to the consideration of his mercy, and teach them to remember that all their temporal blessings emanated from his hand. And it is well when any signal deliverance or plentiful supply of good so arrests your attention, and so engages your feelings, as to make you think more uninterruptedly and more gratefully of Him, whom,

though he is your perpetual Benefactor, you are so apt to forget.

Still, however, this is the attainment at which it becomes you to aim, and of which you will be actually possessed if your faith is strong, and if your views are clear, that you rejoice in what are called the least, as well as in what are called the greatest, of God's providential bounties. Having, in the "witnessing of his Spirit with your spirits," and in the consciousness of your own minds, the relation of "dear children" to him, you will delight yourselves in the continued care with which he silently sustains and befriends you,—not with such high-wrought emotions, indeed, but with as real cordiality and thankfulness as when he controls the raging elements in your behalf, and makes his loving-kindness to you conspicuous in the sight of all men. Supposing that, like the widow of Zarephath, you have only a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse—supposing that you have nothing more than the bread and the water made sure to you which life requires for its bare support—still being undeserved, it is a token of God's mercy—and being a token of God's mercy, you will say of it, "This is the gift of my heavenly Father, who has given me to eat of the bread of life which nourishes the soul, and to draw water out of the wells of an everlasting salvation; and, therefore, scanty as the provision is, and lightly as it is esteemed by those who

have no portion but that of earth, it 'puts more gladness into my heart' than the men of the world can ever have, even 'when their corn and their wine increase.' Trifling and insufficient as it may seem to the carnal eye, I see in it a sign from heaven, that He to whom I have committed all my interests is not unmindful of me. And from this little spot of comfort in the desert, surrounded as I am with dreariness and solitude, and having scarcely room enough for the sole of my foot to rest upon, I can descry in the distance, and am encouraged to anticipate, that better and richer land where I shall 'hunger no more, neither thirst any more,' and where eating of the tree, and drinking of the river of life, I shall be privileged to exult in the fulness of joy for ever."

2. But besides being joyful when you experience temporal good, because it is a token of paternal love on the part of God, you should also be joyful in that experience, because it restores or increases your means of personal improvement and of social usefulness.

There is scarcely a situation, however destitute, in which you may not, to a certain extent, attain both of these ends. But the spiritual ambition, and the enlarged benevolence which must actuate you, if you have been taught of God, and have drunk deep into the spirit of the Gospel, will lead you to desire the largest possible measure of those facilities which may enable you

to grow in individual excellence, and to promote the welfare of others. And when this desire is gratified, through the divine goodness, it must be that your joy shall be proportionally deep-felt and abundant.

There can be little doubt that many of the rejoicing Samaritans felt in this way, both from the effect produced by Philip's miracles on their religious principles and character, and from the peculiar nature of those circumstances out of which these miracles delivered them. They were constrained to believe in Christ, so that "being justified by faith they had peace with God," and were under the guidance of the Spirit of grace and love, and could not fail to long for moral attainments and opportunities of doing good. And from their having been lame, afflicted with palsy, possessed by demons, and subject to various other infirmities and diseases of a similar kind, they must have been not only debarred almost altogether from active or useful exertion, but have even been a burden both to themselves and to their friends. But when freed from such bodily calamities, and the restraints which these imposed upon their faculties, the faith which they embraced in consequence of this divine interposition would lead them to employ their recovered powers in advancing their own good, and in consulting for the good of their neighbours and fellow-citizens, and to rejoice that the ability was restored, while the inclination was also given,

to glorify God in such suitable and practical acknowledgments of his healing mercy.

Whatever was the particular fact with regard to the Samaritans, among whom we are told there was great joy, it is certain that, if your joy is experienced in parallel circumstances, it will owe much of its substance and its intensity to the cause which we have just alluded to. The love of what is excellent having taken possession of your minds, you will naturally and eagerly desire to be adorned with all which that quality implies, and to acquire more and more of the various graces which compose the Christian character. And, as under the impulse of this holy ambition, every thing which retards your progress will be a subject of regret, so whatever tends to promote it will be a source of satisfaction, and make you glad in proportion to its power of adding to the warmth of your piety, and the extent of your virtue. Nor can you fail to be conscious of the same emotions, in reference to the welfare of others—of sorrow, when you are deprived or destitute of the means of advancing it,—and of pleasure, when these means are given back and furnished in abundance; because that principle which inspires you with an enlightened regard for your own improvement and happiness, inspires you at the same time with a generous wish to contribute to the improvement and happiness of your fellow-creatures. In both cases, and from each of these considerations, the

gifts and kindnesses of providence will make you joyful, if the Gospel has been so received into your heart as to teach you the value of personal goodness and the obligations of an expansive charity. In illustration of this, numerous examples may be adduced.

You were long confined, perhaps, to a bed of sickness, and debility, and pain ; and though you were not without comfort, while so distressfully situated, and though you may have derived advantages from the dispensation which otherwise you could not probably have possessed, yet it has doubtless been an interruption to your course of active duty, and has withheld your hand from many a kind office which it would, in a different condition, have been forward to perform. Now that, through divine mercy, you are raised from your sick-bed, and are permitted to exchange the chamber of disease for the free atmosphere of health, and the scene of wonted industry, you indulge in the gladness of soul which such a transition is fitted to inspire. But are you glad merely that you have regained corporeal strength, and are again permitted to walk abroad, and partake of the amusements, or mingle in the business, of the world ? No ; your gladness, if it be that which accompanies the power of Christianity, and accords with its maxims and influences, will rather arise from this,—that you can now follow out the important purposes for which your Lord has destined and qualified you,—that you can

again pursue that onward career of diligence and acquirement in which you had been arrested by the severity of disease,—that you can resume those labours of love from which your exigencies had compelled you to cease,—and that, to the renewal of your accustomed efforts and services, you can add the practical exhibition of those lessons of self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness, and dependence upon God, and compassion for the helpless and distressed, which were enforced upon you, when lying upon the couch of languishing or of agony.

Perhaps you had a beloved parent or a dear friend in whom you trusted under God for advice, and warning, and help, and encouragement in the path of your Christian pilgrimage; and as it had pleased God to afflict him so that he was “sick and nigh unto death,” so it has pleased God to rebuke his maladies, and to give him back to your prayers, and your affections. And it cannot be but that a gleam of rapture lighted up your heart when you saw him rise and return to you, as it were, from the very grave. But you must have poorly appreciated his value, and profited little by his presence, of which you had been so nearly deprived, if you did not hail his return, not merely because there is something tender in the ties of natural kindred and in the endearments of cemented friendship, but also, and still more, because you were to be again blessed with those counsels and admonitions, with that affectionate

aid and that holy example, by which you had been guided in the way of salvation, and kept steadfast in the faith from which you had been so much tempted to swerve, and animated in all those virtuous toils and in all those diffusive charities, by which you are to be made meet for associating in heaven with the “spirits of the just made perfect.”

Or perhaps you have been rescued from worldly embarrassments, which from their magnitude and extent had broken down the energy of your spirits, checked you in the cultivation of your talents, abridged and almost destroyed your power of promoting the comfort and prosperity of your fellow-men, and reduced you to decay and uselessness, in a sphere which you formerly filled with the fruits of Christian and substantial beneficence. And in the relief from these embarrassments which God has afforded you in the dealings of his providence, and in the restoration of that plenty which had formerly ministered so copiously and so variously to your gratification, you must be devoid of all sensibility if you are not conscious of more than ordinary delight. But though there are various things which must conduce to cherish that feeling in your minds, this will hold an influential and distinguished place, that you have recovered wherewithal you may again engage in those pursuits which tend to increase your knowledge and meliorate your character, by which you may give full exercise to

many a virtue that might have languished for want of suitable objects, and by which, while you make greater progress yourselves in the things that are excellent, you may be instrumental in furthering the grand interests of humanity and religion in the world, in supplying the wants or stimulating the industry of the poor, in giving instruction to the ignorant, in protecting the fatherless and helping the widow, and in causing the light of the Gospel to shine upon them that are still in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death.

But, in short, whatever be the benefit which God has communicated to you—of whatever kind or in whatever degree—the joy which it occasions will be neither carnal nor selfish ; it will be indebted for its origin, and for its ardour, and for its permanency, both to the spiritual effects produced on your own conduct and condition by the divine bounty in which you rejoice, and to the means and opportunities with which it provides you, for prosecuting your schemes of benevolence and usefulness among your brethren of mankind.

Thus it will be with all of you to whom the grace of God has not been given in vain, but who have learned to estimate aright things temporal and things spiritual, and to give to them severally their due importance, and their proper influence on one another. You will have great joy when you experience the divine mercy in bestowing

upon you the good things of this life, because you will descry in these the same loving-kindness of you heavenly Father which provides for you the better blessings of an eternal salvation ; and because they constitute the means by which you are to become worthier as his children upon earth, and as the heirs of his kingdom in heaven.

Let those, whose joy proceeds chiefly or entirely from the mere worldly, sensual, or temporal gratifications which the gifts of providence are capable of affording, remember that this is an abuse and a perversion of God's goodness to them—that it is a decisive and awful proof that they are far from the possession of his favour and from the knowledge of his ways—and that making this the ultimate object of their life and of their hopes, they demonstrate that, as the pleasures of a present state must be soon, and may be suddenly, at an end, they are rejoicing in folly, in guilt, and in peril. Let me conjure such of you to escape without delay from this monstrous delusion—this state of infatuation and of danger. Seek for your joy, where alone it is to be found, in the friendship of Almighty God. Never forget that there is no real, no lasting joy which does not come from that fountain. Study to feel and to act upon the conviction, that it alone can give you “the joy which no man taketh from you” in this world ; and that it alone can bring you to the joy which is full, and unmingled, and never ending, in the world that is to come.

SERMON VI.

JOY FOR SPIRITUAL MERCIES.

ACTS viii. 8.

And there was great joy in that city.

THE cause of the joy that prevailed in the city of Samaria, as we formerly observed, was twofold. Philip miraculously cured the diseases of the people, and thus restored health to individuals, and comfort and independence to the families with whom they were connected. And he preached Christ, through whose power and name he performed those miracles of healing, as the promised Messiah, the expected Redeemer. There was joy on account of *temporal* mercies; and there was joy on account of *spiritual* mercies. The first of these we have already considered.

II. We are now to consider the joy that was felt in Samaria on account of *spiritual* mercies.

Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans—he delivered to them the message of salvation—he sounded in their ears, and addressed to their hearts, those glad tidings, by which they were as-

sured of the pardon of sin, acceptance with God, and in the end everlasting life. And then they believed in what Philip said to them—they gave a cordial reception to the doctrine of reconciliation by the cross of Jesus—they embraced him who was offered to them as an all-sufficient Redeemer : and their faith was made so strong by the miraculous demonstrations with which the servant of God accompanied his discourses, and by the inward teaching and influence of the Holy Spirit, that they consented to be baptized, and by undergoing this rite, vowed to undertake all the duties of their Christian profession, and to expose themselves to the severe persecutions, which at that period were almost necessarily connected with it. Thus instructed in the “ exceeding great and precious promises” of the Gospel—thus appropriating these by a strong and living faith—and thus renewed and sanctified, so as to be conscious subjects of divine grace, and animated with the hope of life and immortality, they naturally felt a joy with which they had never before been touched, and which equally in its sources, its degree, and its permanency, was unspeakably great.

Now, if the Gospel has been made known to us as it was to the Samaritans, and if we have welcomed it as they did, we must be similarly affected with joy. The circumstances to whose operation we are in this case subjected, do necessarily pro-

duce that effect. So necessarily are the two united, that if the effect is not produced, the inference is unavoidable, either that the cause has been prevented from bearing upon us at all, or that it has been thwarted and counteracted by unpropitious interferences. It is very true that, even where the cause operates aright, and the effect is really produced, various things may occur or exist to modify our feelings. In one individual the joy may be even ecstatic, and in another it may be at the lowest ebb ; and in the same individual it may undergo many variations in degree, and sometimes alternate between the one extreme and the other. But still the Gospel is of such an interesting description, and is so essentially calculated to work upon the constitutional principles and susceptibilities of our nature, that whenever it is correctly unfolded, and meets with the belief and obedience of those to whom its truths are conveyed, it must—it cannot fail to render the heart more or less joyful. So much is this the case, that Christianity is called, as its peculiar and distinctive appellation, “good tidings of great joy.” And every representation given of it in the Bible conveys the same idea of its nature and tendency, so that while we continue to be what we are as human beings, it cannot come into close contact with our minds, and be received by them in the faith and love of it, without recommending and prov-

ing itself to them as a fountain of consolation and gladness. It is a remedy for them that are spiritually diseased. It is deliverance to such as are in danger and distress. It is the assurance of divine mercy, where, without that mercy, ruin is inevitable. It is the emancipation of the whole man from a thralldom the most degrading and miserable. It is the promise of a felicity whose certainty and perfection justify the highest hopes that man can entertain. And, therefore, wherever Christianity is allowed to find its way into the heart—in that heart into which it has penetrated, in its native power, and with corresponding acceptance and submission, there must be joy, whether it be a joy that barely overcomes the sorrows with which it is intermingled, or whether it be “a joy that is unspeakable, and full of glory.”

Let us only think of the information which Christianity conveys, that we may see how necessarily it excites gladness, on the common principles that we rationally and practically acknowledge in the more ordinary events by which we are moved. Do we rejoice to learn that some worldly disaster—some temporary evil that we greatly feared, has been so averted from us, that we are no longer in any danger? Well then; we learn from the Gospel, that infinitely the greatest of all calamities, the everlasting destruction of the soul, is provided against so effec-

tually, that there neither is nor can be "condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Do we rejoice to be assured that some earthly friend to whom we had given just offence has relented, is willing to overlook our fault, to be wholly reconciled to us, and to re-instate us in his favour? Well then; the Gospel assures us that our friend in heaven, even God himself, whose favour is life, whose displeasure is death, but against whom we had sinned, so as to be under the curse of his law, has exercised compassion, and made such arrangements that our iniquities may be blotted out, and our peace with him regained and secured. Do we rejoice to be told that a distemper which threatened to be mortal may be arrested, and that our abode in this world may yet be prolonged for a few passing years? Well then; the Gospel tells us that death, which we so much dreaded, is deprived of its sting—that it is so completely stripped of its terrors as, in the language of the Bible, to be abolished and destroyed—and that it need not be feared any more. Do we rejoice when we are informed, that through the unmerited kindness of some relative, we are to have the reversion of a fortune or an estate which we must soon leave to others? Well then; the Gospel informs us that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of his abundant and undeserved mercy, has reserved for us "an inheritance in heaven, which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

We might multiply this illustration a hundred fold, by referring to every individual blessing concerning which the Gospel gives forth its positive and precious statements, and finding to these some parallel in the ordinary blessings of a present life, which invariably communicate pleasure to those within whose reach, or at whose taking they are placed. But enough has been said to show that the very information which the Gospel contains and intimates, is fitted in its own nature to inspire us with gladness ; and that if satisfied of the reality of those benefits which it holds out to our contemplation, and of our personal interest in them, either now or hereafter, they must just as certainly impart joy to our minds, as those other benefits to which we have alluded ; and should do so, of course, in a measure proportioned to that vastly superior importance and necessity by which they are characterized.

But then it behoves us to have this feeling of interest in the blessings of the Gospel, in order that we may greatly and safely rejoice in them, and moreover, to have this feeling of interest in them created and established according to the scriptural method. Some people—too many, it is to be feared—are comforted and gladdened by the discoveries of the Gospel without any good warrant. They seem to imagine, that merely because a Saviour is provided, and a work of redemption accomplished, they may banish all

their fears and anxieties, and be “joyful in the Lord.” On this simple fact, acknowledged by them speculatively, and made the substance of a Christian profession, they rest their title to rejoice. Whereas, according to the Gospel scheme, this fact, true and interesting as it is in itself, and vast and momentous as it is in its consequences, is of no avail to any sinner till it is received by him, and submitted to by him, as “a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.” It serves not him, more than it does all other human beings besides, that Christ died to “take away sin,” unless he gets such a hold of the merit of that death as that it takes away *his* sin. In no other way can it be of any use to him as to his state before God and for eternity; and, therefore, in no other way can it be a legitimate source of consolation and joy.

Now, this attainment is made by the exercise of faith in Christ—by giving full credit to the testimony of God concerning him—and by accepting of him as that testimony represents him, and holds him out to sinners. And the moment that Christ thus becomes our Saviour, not only does joy naturally spring up in the soul, but it exists there, and ought to be cherished there, as sanctioned by Him from whom the pardon and salvation which produce it have been derived,—as itself a privilege which he confers, equally valuable and divine. We are not to rejoice be-

cause we believe, as if our joy were to arise from any thing within ourselves ; but because the Saviour, in whom we trust, is all sufficient for us, and because all the blessings which are requisite to constitute our safety and our happiness are secured and made over to us by him whom God has set forth to redeem us. And being in this manner united to Christ, and reconciled to God, through the instrumentality of faith, it is not necessary that we defer our joy till, by a course of practical experiment, we have ascertained that this is our spiritual state. If we give credit to what God has declared respecting his own mercy, as manifested in Jesus Christ, and have accepted of the gift of salvation as he has offered it, it is absurd to talk of hesitating whether we shall rejoice or not. Good news, if we give credit to them, cannot make us sad. Deliverance from the most awful and most imminent dangers, if we believe that it has been wrought out for us, cannot be regarded with indifference. The conscious reception, or the assured prospect of such things as the friendship which God offers to us, and of the heavenly happiness which he sets before us, cannot but fill our hearts with great joy. And if this emotion should form itself into a song of praise and thanksgiving to him that has loved us, and if death should immediately call us away, that song would just be the prelude or the beginning of those hallelujahs which, in the

celestial world, are to express the gratitude of all "the redeemed from the earth."

Thus it was with the Samaritan converts. They had great joy. But it was an immediate sequence of their "believing the things that Philip preached concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ." They did not wait till the reality of their faith and of their interest in the blessings of the Gospel was demonstrated by practical, visible, lengthened proofs; but rejoiced whenever they believed. This joy was not more authorised by the terms and purport of the message which the servant of God delivered to them, than it was the native and spontaneous result of that mental process which was carried on when the offer of a free and full salvation was made to them in the name of the Lord, and accepted of by them in the exercise of faith. And had they been instantly removed by death—removed even before they were baptized, or had any farther opportunity of manifesting the change that had been wrought upon them, there cannot be a doubt that heaven would have been their portion; where, having their faith turned into vision, their joy would have been converted into rapture. Unless we admit this, the sinner is again brought under the law, and his salvation is no longer of grace but by works—no longer connected with a living faith, but with a prolonged obedience as the means of justification and

eternal life. The legal command, "Do this and live," would be made to supersede the Gospel declaration, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

It is evident that our joy as Christians will be in proportion to our faith—other things being the same. We do not enter here into the controversy about assurance of faith, which we conceive to be a controversy more of words than of any thing else. Taking the terms in their fair and obvious meaning, it is according to the doctrine of Scripture, and according to the strictest reasonings of mental philosophy, and according to the consciousness of every man who attends to the operations of his own mind, to assert that assurance is of the essence of faith, whether you understand by faith, your belief in God's testimony to Christ, or your acceptance of Christ, and your trust in him for salvation, according to the terms and tenor of that divine testimony. It is so much so, that if you take away all assurance, we should find it impossible to give any intelligible description of faith, or at least to realize it, either as a source of comfort, or as a principle of action. But then it is as undeniable that this faith or assurance—for indeed they may be used very much as convertible terms—admits of degrees. There may be a strong faith, and there may be a weak faith. There may be a faith so small as to be compared to a grain of

mustard seed, and there may be a faith so great as to unshackle itself from sense, and enter into the third heavens. And all the gradations of which it is susceptible will have each its corresponding measure of satisfaction and delight, according to the law by which every effect is proportioned to its cause. The clearer and more multiplied our evidence is of the truths of the Gospel, and of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ in whatsoever that evidence may consist, the more vivid and vigorous will be our faith: and the more vivid and vigorous our faith, the more lively, the more substantial, the more unmingled will be that joy which faith, in its every degree, is fitted to produce. And, therefore, that we may abound in joy, let it be our care and our study to abound in faith—to have brighter and more impressive conceptions of what is given us to believe, more heartfelt convictions of its reality and its importance, and a more simple and entire dependence both upon the testimony of God, who reveals to us the method of salvation, and upon the merit of Christ, who is himself the sum and substance of the message which he brings.

In all the monotonous discussions that we hear respecting assurance of faith and fulness of joy, we can recognise nothing that is new or original. The doctrine is found in the Bible—it is recognised in the standards of our Church—it finds a

place more or less prominent in the ministry of every well instructed and faithful pastor ; and it is realized in the experience of every true Christian, whether he talks about it or not. The only original feature of the case, as it is exhibited by modern declaimers, is, that it is made to engross the whole attention—that it is dwelt upon, as if there were no other truth or tenet in the sacred volume—that it is separated from those views with which it is intimately and essentially connected in the Gospel scheme, and is thus made liable to be greatly misunderstood, and dangerously abused. We speak by scriptural warrant, when we say, labour after the full assurance of faith* as a practicable, as well as a most desirable attainment, and instead of resting satisfied in the vague generality, that Christ died for the salvation of men, believe in him with the heart, and with all the heart, for your own personal salvation. And believing thus in Christ, deny yourselves not the comfort which such a salvation as God has offered you, and as you have accepted of, is calculated to impart : look to the precious blessings of which it consists, that you may have peace and joy, and think of the divine mediatorship and of the faithful word by which they are secured to you, that you “ may have it more abundantly.” Believe in Christ, and strive that

* Note A in the Appendix.

in your faith there may be “nothing wavering.” This is your duty, and why should not you perform it? Rejoice in Christ—rejoice in him greatly—rejoice in him for evermore:—this is your privilege, and why should you not use it?

But remember that the same authority which commands you to believe, and calls upon you to rejoice, does also present to you delineations and enforcements of a character which you must possess, otherwise all your “religion is vain.” That you may be true Christians, there must be a regeneration of your hearts—there must be holiness in your lives—there must be active, and conscientious, and unreserved devotedness to the will of God. This is the work which he has given you to do; and to neglect it on any account whatever, is to forfeit and forego all the benefits which are promised in the covenant of grace. The faith, indeed, which you repose in Christ, and which gives joy to your heart, is a faith which receives him for this, among other purposes, that he may redeem you from the power and pollution of sin, and consecrate you to the service of God; and were it possible for you to believe in him to the exclusion of that part of his saving character, your joy would be presumptuous and delusive. So that spiritual joy and spiritual renovation are inseparably united. It is very true that, believing in Christ, as we formerly observed, you are entitled to rejoice

without delay, and you are safe and happy, even though you should be instantaneously called to your account. But while that faith does necessarily respect Christ as your sanctification, it must never be forgotten that the sacred record which reveals the method of salvation is not written and inspired, solely or chiefly for such remarkable cases as that which we have just adverted to. It is intended for the great body of Christians, whose time of probation is lengthened out, and who have a continued opportunity of manifesting, in "the fruits of righteousness," the reality of that change which has been accomplished in the soul, and the influence of that message which has been received in faith, and productive of inward joy. And as you believe and rejoice, so you must give all diligence to abound in godliness and in good works, beginning this course of moral obedience at the very outset of your believing profession, and prosecuting it with patience, and industry, and zeal, even to the last hour of your existence.

The Samaritans acted in this manner. We do not read of their after conduct; but so far as the narrative goes they did all of which their time and opportunities admitted. We are told that they were baptized—and this you will observe, implied incalculably more than it does among us, to whom engagement in Christian ordinances, and openness of Christian profession,

bring honour and advantage, rather than privation or disgrace. By undergoing the rite of baptism, they braved all the terrors of persecution; they pledged themselves to maintain that purity of demeanour which the washing with water signified; they gave proof that there dwelt within them those holy principles, and dispositions, and purposes, which constitute the ground-work of holy deportment, and to which they would give full effect in all the succeeding stages of their pilgrimage.

And so must it be with us, even in relation to that rejoicing in which it is a part of our Christian vocation to indulge. We are not, indeed, to rejoice, because we act aright, any more than we are to rejoice, because we believe aright. Our joy must take its origin, and derive its nourishment, ultimately from him in whom our faith is placed, and to whom our obedience is paid. Still, however, a holy life, in reference to our spiritual joy, is of vast importance in two ways.

First, it is the test by which we are to ascertain that our joy is not false and delusive. There is a joy of this kind. It proceeds from frames, and feelings, and fancies. And such is the deceitfulness of the heart, that it may be experienced in a high degree where the soul is far from God, and unfit for heaven. To guard against a deception so fatal and ruinous, it is necessary that we "examine ourselves whether we be in the

faith," wanting which, the Gospel speaks nothing that is good to us, and whether we are entitled to be glad in the Lord as our Lord, our Saviour, and our portion. And the only thing that can satisfactorily and conclusively determine these points is a conversation and a conduct becoming the Gospel—such a cordial hatred and habitual avoidance of sin, and such a paramount love of God's law and unreserved submission to it, as will make it manifest both to ourselves and others that we are under the guidance and dominion of divine grace, and have really experienced that love of God in Christ Jesus, from the experience of which alone any true enjoyment can be derived.

And then, in the *second* place, while practical godliness thus satisfies us that we are not rejoicing without warrant, the more we possess of that character—the more that we are addicted to the exercises of a renewed mind—the more that we advance in the path of virtuous attainment, the stronger evidence do we obtain of our interest in the blessings of redemption, and the stronger reason have we for encouraging ourselves in that joy with which the blessings of redemption are so well fitted to fill the spirit. Our righteousness cannot and should not be the ground on which we rejoice. We must "rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh." But it nevertheless holds true—it is true in rea-

son—it is true in Scripture—and it is true in fact, that as the fuller the assurance of our faith is, the larger will be the measure of our joy in him whom we believe, so the purer and more perfect our personal holiness is, as evidential of our faith, and of our participation in the blessings connected with it, it must follow of course that in the same proportion will be the joy which in both cases flows from the good news contained in the message of the Gospel. It is therefore not only a point of essential duty, but contributive to our comfort and happiness, that we labour along with the cultivation of an unbounded reliance upon Christ, to have the same mind which was in him, and to walk even as he also walked. And then we shall be among the number of those to whom the Spirit, one of whose fruits is this very joy, speaks thus, “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart,” while we can say from our own consciousness, with the Apostles, “Our rejoicing is this, even the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.”

It becomes those of you who have been enabled to rejoice in the possession of spiritual mercies, to abound in thanksgiving to Him by whom these mercies have been all conferred. And it equally becomes you, while your soul cherishes

gratitude to the Lord and your "mouth speaks his praise," to manifest your deep sense of obligation by practical and willing devotion to his service. The happier he has made you by the communications of his grace, the more forward, and unreserved, and cheerful, should be your obedience to the requisitions of his will. And this will show itself to be, not a formal conclusion drawn from what you have ascertained to be due to him for his goodness, but the natural and spontaneous tribute of those feelings which that goodness has engendered in your breast. Your heart being enlarged with the experience of his kindness to you in Christ Jesus, and of the multifarious blessings which that kindness has poured into your lot, it must be that with zeal, with alacrity, with delight, you shall "run in the way of his commandments." And in the growing conformity to God's law, which will be thus produced, you will find an ever increasing source of that comfort and joy, to whose constraining influence its richest and its loftiest attainments must be in a great measure ascribed.

You are too well aware of what human nature is, even in its best estate, and too well acquainted with the circumstances in which every Christian is involved, to lay your account with unmingled and uninterrupted enjoyment in your experience of spiritual mercies. Many things will always exist to qualify your feelings of pleasure, and sometimes events will occur to fill you

with sorrow and dejection. But amidst all these adversities you have no reason to despair ; the sources of consolation are ever accessible to you ; and there is no insuperable barrier in your way back to that happiness from which, for a season, you may have been estranged. He who at first, as the God of reconciliation, put gladness into your hearts, will “ never leave you nor forsake you.” Cleave to him with unwavering affiance and with resolute attachment ; and though he may have “ brought you into the wilderness,” you will hear him “ speaking comfortably to you” even there. “ Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light ? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” And though “ weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.” In all your times of trouble, “ cry to him with your voice ;” doubt not of his willingness to visit you with every solacing influence that you need ; plead his own gracious and encouraging promises ; while your prayer ascends to his mercy-seat, let your faith rest on the infinite merit, and prevalent intercessions, of that Redeemer, to whom he can refuse nothing that his people need ; and he will “ make you to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which he has broken may rejoice.” He will “ restore to you the joys of his salvation,

and will uphold you with his free Spirit." He will "deal so bountifully with you," that your "soul may return unto its rest," "sing the Lord's song in this strange land," and "rejoice in the hope of his glory."

Let me, in conclusion, address one word to those who are strangers to this spiritual joy of which we have been speaking. You rejoice in wordly things—in riches, honours, power, amusement, intellectual acquirements, earthly friendships. You give full proof then that you are susceptible of the emotion ; and that if you do not feel it with regard to the Gospel, it must be from ignorance, from regardlessness, from unbelief, from some cause equally unworthy and fatal. Know you not that all your favourite joys must soon come to an end ; and that if you do not now choose a better part, and follow a better course, their termination will be the beginning of sorrows that shall last for ever ? O do not thus cast away your souls for the poor, momentary gratifications by which the world and sin would cheat you out of the happiness for which you were created, and to which you are recalled by the voice of wisdom and of mercy. Instantly and altogether renounce those pursuits and pleasures which, having no relation to the will and glory of God, are subject to his overwhelming curse. Come to him as, in Jesus Christ,

the fountain of life and felicity ; and surrender yourselves to his mercy, that he may impart to you the joy which a present world can neither give nor take away, and which will delight, and elevate, and enrapture your souls, through all the ages of eternity.

SERMON VII.

HUMILITY EXPLAINED, AND ITS NECESSITY ENFORCED.

JAMES IV. 10.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

HUMILITY stands opposed to pride. And as pride consists in our entertaining higher ideas of ourselves than truth will warrant, and in our presuming upon these, both in feeling and in practice, as if they were just and correct, so humility consists in our entertaining accurate notions of what we really are in relation to some one above us, and in preserving that station which a regard to our real merit requires us to occupy, as to the sentiments we cherish and the conduct we maintain, with respect to those under whom we are placed.

There is a species of humility which does not come under this definition ; but then, it is not humility properly so called. It might be more exactly denominated *condescension*. It is a going down—not to the situation which strictly belongs to the being of whom it may be asserted

—but to a situation lower than that which he natively and righteously holds, in order to perform some particular duty, or to engage in some particular exercise of mercy. Thus when the Christian, in obedience to divine precept, “condescends to men of low estate,” he is said to be humble ; but the act itself, on account of which he is called humble, is simply the act of placing himself on a level with those to whom he is otherwise superior, and is entitled to the appellation of *humility* as a Christian grace, because his obligations demand it, and his condition does not forbid it. Christ is said, somewhat in the same sense, to have humbled himself, when he became our incarnate and suffering Redeemer ; for *when* he thus humbled himself, humility could not possibly be an attribute of his character ; but he *became* humble, or stooped from the divine eminence on which he stood, and assumed a nature, and undertook a work, and clothed himself with circumstances, all which involved necessarily the idea of lowliness, and exacted from him corresponding views and corresponding deportment. And still more, humility is ascribed to God, though spoken of as “over all,” and not in reference to any such events as took place in the humiliation of Christ. He is said to “humble himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth,”—a phraseology which is intended to intimate, not that there is any thing in

his nature and circumstances which make humility either indispensable or becoming, or that he is really practising humility when he takes an inspection of his own universe, but only that he is so great and glorious in the eternity of his being, and in the infinitude of his perfections, that it looks like humility, or a declining from his inconceivable elevation, when he concerns himself with created things which are all but of yesterday, and are speedily to be dissolved and to perish.

The humility inculcated in my text, is humility in reference, not to another creature more exalted than ourselves, but to God, who is immeasurably exalted above all creatures. And in this simple relation, even though we had done nothing to offend him, humility is at once graceful and necessary ; for, as we owe every thing to him, and as we depend upon him for every thing, it would be arrogant, presumptuous, undutiful, to have one thought towards him or to make one movement before him, which proceeded on the supposition that we were not so indebted and so dependent. Not only are our bodily endowments and our outward prosperity derived exclusively from his sovereign pleasure ; but were our moral excellence such as his eye could behold without blame or dissatisfaction, still that would be the result of his divine operation, the gift of his undeserved goodness ; and, therefore, it would be incumbent on us to look to him, to feel

towards him, to be governed by him, as those who had nothing of their own whereof to boast,—to avoid every thing approaching to self-sufficiency or self-confidence—to live at all times and in every respect as the offspring of his power, and as the pensioners of his bounty—to withhold no kind of acknowledgment and no degree of obeisance, which could possibly be required on the one side, or rendered on the other.

But the humility enjoined upon us not only respects our relation to God as his creatures, whose every faculty, and whose every attainment, and whose every possession, must be traced to him, and to him alone—it also respects our relation to him as his *sinful* creatures—as creatures who have set themselves in opposition to his authority—as creatures who are thus removed at a still greater distance from him than they naturally were—as creatures who have not merely received from his free benignity all that they have of good, but who are, moreover, sadly degraded and polluted in his sight, and liable to his high and holy indignation. The angels in heaven are endowed with vast powers—they fill an elevated sphere—they have retained their moral dignity, and have no sin to make them ashamed. And yet even to them humility is suitable, because all that is worthy in them is an emanation from God, and their very continuance in his presence and in his service, is a proof that

by this quality they are eminently distinguished. But how much more emphatical is it in its application to us, and how much more thoroughly should it pervade our minds, when we recollect that we have sunk ourselves still lower in the scale of intelligence than the place originally allotted us—that we have tarnished our honours and cast away our excellence—that to all our inherent vanity and weakness we have added that which provokes God's detestation, and makes us the objects of God's vengeance!

Now when in these views we exhort you to be humble, we do not exhort you to think yourselves worse or meaner than you really are. Were we to give you such an exhortation, and were it possible for you to comply with it, you could not actually do so without committing an error and violating truth, which cannot be right in any case. It would be quite unbefitting in any of the celestial hierarchy, one of whose characteristics it is that they have kept their first estate, to signify that they had fallen from it by transgressing against God, or to act as if they were covered with the disgrace of apostacy. And there would be no propriety in any of the children of men, taking to themselves the guilt or the ignominy of having yielded to a particular temptation, which divine grace had enabled them steadfastly to resist, and finally to overcome. On the same principle, and in like manner, our ad-

monition to humility, does not imply that you should confess any sin which you have not committed, or cherish any sentiment which your demerit does not strictly warrant, or sink one degree deeper in your own estimation than the truth of your character and the law of God require. We only exhort you to form a just and precise valuation of what you really are, as compared with what you ought to be, according to the rule which has been divinely enacted for your government; and to give place to the convictions, to cherish the impressions, and to maintain the conduct, which such an appreciation is strictly calculated to produce. And this exhortation is highly important and requisite, in the *first* place, because, unless we have just notions of what we are as sinners, and entertain the feelings naturally arising from these, we can neither perceive the value, nor be prepared for the reception, of any scheme that may be devised for our deliverance; and, in the *second* place, because, among the principles of our fallen nature, pride is that which has perhaps the greatest ascendancy over our minds, and is continually leading us to "think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think," and prevents us from giving heed to those considerations, and admitting the truth or making the application of those statements, which go to determine what we really are, and by doing so, to fix us at our proper level,

When we say that the exhortation to humble yourselves, does not imply that you assume any guilt which does not belong to you, or that you hold a lower opinion of your demerit than what is founded in fact, we only do that which is necessary to free our statement from every thing that is extravagant, and to prevent it from being repelled or disregarded as unjust. There is nothing admitted or insinuated which can properly generate in your minds one feeling of self-complacency. If there be any sinful quality or any particular act of transgression with which you are not chargeable, that negative exception does not affect your essential character. It respects not the principle itself which constitutes your delinquency, but only the degree in which that principle has been inwardly harboured, or actually reduced to practice. And when viewed even in its simplest aspect, it necessarily tends to abase you, and leaves you no room, and gives you no encouragement, to lift up your eyes in confidence to heaven.

The great and vital fact with respect to you is, that you are stained with sin. There may be an endless variety in the mode and in the measure of sinning with which different individuals are chargeable. This man may be the slave of one unholy passion, and that man may be the slave of another. Each person has his own predominant propensities, his own peculiar temptations,

his own inviting or convenient opportunities. And you may never find two individuals so much alike, either in the kind or in the degree of immorality which attaches to them, as that you could place them on the same footing. But still all the diversities which appear among them, are but modifications of the same quality ; and whatever names you give to these, and in whatever way you describe them, and whatever you may allege as to their several causes, and appearances, and effects, there is one thing in which they all agree, and by which they are all characterized—they fix upon every man that partakes of them in any shape or in any proportion, the stamp of sin.

And what is sin ? It is the perversion and abuse of those faculties with which your Maker has endowed you : It is an impeachment of his infinite wisdom : It is opposition to his supreme and righteous authority : It is ingratitude for his unspeakable goodness : It is defiance offered to the arm of his omnipotence : It is the defacement of all that was fair and beautiful in your primeval nature : It is the forfeiture of every thing that is comfortable or precious in the possession of divine love : It is a violation of that order which God has established in his universe : It is the madness of preferring the gratifications of time to the happiness of eternity, and of rushing through all the barriers of reason, and conscience, and duty, and interest, into certain and everlasting destruction. And if this be a true descrip-

tion of sin, surely a consciousness of its having any place whatever in your heart—of its being in any measure found in your deportment, should prevent you from having one high thought of your own worth, and should rather make you feel all the shame of fallen and degraded creatures.

Do not suppose, my friends, that you have any refuge in the paucity of your misdeeds. You may be apt to imagine that there are various commandments which you have never literally broken—that there are many iniquities which you have not perpetrated—that there are but a few spots of moral delinquency to impair the general purity and virtue of your life—and that, therefore, the call for humility in your case is not very loud or commanding. But this is both an irrational and unscriptural mode of judging. It is the nature of sin itself, and not its multiplicity merely, which subjects you to degradation. It is its power in the soul, and not its actual and manifold exhibition in the outward conduct, by which you are debased. It is the principle that actuates you, and not the practice that flows from it, which determines what you really are as subjects of the divine government. And hence, the doctrine which is laid down on this subject by the Apostle James ; “ He that offendeth in one point, is guilty of all.” If you offend in one point—if you disobey God in a single instance, there is implied in this such a contempt or such a defi-

ance of his authority as makes you "guilty of all"—the authority which you have trampled upon in transgressing the particular commandment confessed to, being the sanction of every other commandment with which it is associated, and there being nothing but want of opportunity, or want of temptation, or want of ability, which prevents you from transgressing all of them. For "he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor," not merely of the sixth commandment, which forbids murder, but "*of the LAW*,"—of the law in *general*—of the *whole* law, every part of that law being enacted by one and the same authority—the authority of God; and it being impossible to say that you have a real respect for God's authority in the cases in which you do not outwardly break his statutes, while yet you rebel against his authority, and set it at nought, in the individual case to which you plead guilty, and while the essence of your guilt must be held as consisting in that very rebellion. So that, taking this spiritual view of obedience—judging in this comprehensive way of the divine law, of its sanctions and obligations, you must perceive that the small number of your transgressions, especially if they have been wilful, deliberate, or habitual, can have very little effect in diminishing that sinfulness on account of which every one to whom it attaches

ought to be humbled and ashamed. And if you consider the circumstances in which you have been placed, the advantages you have enjoyed, the restraints that have been imposed upon you, the motives that you had to act a contrary part, you may perhaps see reason to charge yourselves with greater vileness than can be ascribed to many others in whom there have been more visible, and more numerous, and more enormous deviations from the ways of righteousness.

But which of you can venture to say—which of you can bring yourselves to believe, that your transgressions are few in number? Consider the extent—the strictness—the spirituality of that law to which you are subject, and by which you ought to be governed; then compare with its holy requisitions the manner in which you have demeaned yourselves, even in your own partial and imperfect estimation; and say if your transgressions are not more than can be numbered—if they do not abound in all that you have thought and said and done—if they have not pervaded the whole of your personal and social and relative deportment—if they have not mingled in your worldly pursuits and in your religious exercises—if they have not cleaved to your private actings and to your public life—and if they have not in every case been accompanied with aggravations which have added to their intrinsic heinousness, and have given to all your guilt a deeper and a blacker dye? And if you have any right ap-

prehensions at all of the evil nature and consequences of sin, can it be that, with a conviction of its thus so extensively and thoroughly prevailing in your character, you should not be humbled to the very dust in your own esteem, and casting away all high imaginations, “lie down in your shame, and let your confusion cover you?”

And, then, observe that your demerit is to be estimated not in the sight of men, but “in the sight of the Lord.” Not in the sight of men. This is too frequently all the test which sinners apply to themselves, and therefore they judge falsely. Your fellow-creatures see not the whole of your conduct—they know not your principles—they are unacquainted with your motives—they cannot dive into your thoughts. And, therefore, independently of the erroneous standard which they employ when deciding upon your merits, their ignorance of all that lies under the mere surface, and of all over which you may intentionally throw the cloak of dissimulation and secrecy, may lead them to attribute to you a purity which you do not possess, and flatter you with the persuasion that your failings are inconsiderable, and that you have reason, notwithstanding these, to be proud of your attainments and your virtues. No; my friends—not in the sight of men, but in the sight of *the Lord*, who “seeth not as man seeth,” and judgeth not as man judgeth. And remember that he is infinitely

holy. His law which you have violated is but a transcript of those moral perfections which are inherent in his nature ; and every transgression of it which you commit is a direct insult offered to himself, rendering you more unlike him, more odious in his regard, more obnoxious to his displeasure : and actions which a misjudging world might either overlook or approve of, are, to his pure and jealous eye, an offence and an abomination. Remember, also, that he is omniscient ; that nothing which you have done has escaped his notice ; that your most secret as well as your most public transactions—the thoughts and feelings of your hearts, as well as the outward and visible doings of your conduct, are naked and open before him ; that he is “ acquainted with all your ways,” and with all your desires, and with all your purposes, in a style of knowledge which defies the efforts even of your own consciences ; that there is not a shade of iniquity, however slight, lurking in the most sequestered corner of your life, or in the deepest retirement of your mind, which does not stand revealed to his view, as if it were shone upon and made manifest by the broad light of day. And remember, finally, that you are exactly—not what you yourselves may think, however much you may strive against the delusions of self-love, and not what you may be deemed by others, however free they may be from the influence of prejudice, and error, and

partiality—but that you are exactly what God sees you to be, and what his judgment pronounces you to be. That is the measure of your sinfulness ; and if your humility should be in proportion to your sinfulness, what limit can be set to it, what modification of it can be indulged in, what feeling of high-mindedness or of self-satisfaction can be harboured, without practising a ruinous deception on your own souls, and adding one sin more, and that one perhaps greater than them all, to the countless number which already defile your whole moral frame, and sink you to a depth of debasement which you need not attempt to fathom ?

Humility, however, is so mortifying to the human mind, that before it can obtain a settlement there, every attempt is made to discover reasons for believing that it is neither necessary nor appropriate. And one of the most common refuges in which the natural pride of man fortifies itself, is the self-righteous plea of what is called innocence and amiableness of character. It is not only one of the most common, but one of the most difficult to remove. He who plumes himself on his possession of great and splendid virtues, may have his tone of exultation lowered by being reminded of the positive and mischievous vices, with which these are often associated or contrasted in his deportment. He who dwells on his punctual and devout observance of religious

ordinances, may be told with effect of those moral delinquencies with which he is chargeable, and for which the tithes, and the fasts, and the prayers that he boasts of, can make no atonement. And he who in the public eye exhibits much apparent excellence, and by his deeds of usefulness and his acknowledged respectability, is exalted in his own esteem, as well as in the esteem of others, may be borne down by an appeal to his consciousness of violated duty, and of criminal indulgence, in the scene of private life. But the persons to whom I particularly refer are cased in such a panoply of gentle dispositions and passive virtues, as to be invulnerable by any of the modes of attack which in other cases are found successful. There is no malevolence—no profligacy—no injustice—no profaneness—no turbulence or wrath. There is meekness of temper—there is suavity of speech—there is kindness of manners—there is sobriety of behaviour—there is abundance of “melting charity”—there is attention to sacred exercises—there is the cultivation of domestic sympathies—there is the fulfilment of social and relative obligations. There are all these things, or there is such a degree and combination of them, as to give to the individuals whom they adorn, the impression that, having little or nothing wherewithal they can reproach themselves, and coming as near perfection as the frailty of human nature will allow, they

would be guilty of meanness, or would perform an act of unnecessary condescension, were they to acknowledge their personal unworthiness, to put on the garb of humility, and to abase themselves deeply before God. All our exhortations to this effect would be met by the challenge—"Why, what evil have we done? What proofs of depravity have we exhibited? What can you specify in our behaviour that should prevent us from lifting up our heads in confidence, and cherishing the hope of a heavenly recompense?"

If any of you belong to this class, let me urge it upon you, that you labour under a delusion as dangerous and as fatal as any that can come upon the sinner. Granting that you are as harmless, as amiable, as deserving of esteem, as you are thought to be; or that you merited a still higher eulogium than what your fondest friends have bestowed upon you,—still it is all unavailing. And I do not say this, merely because the simple fact of your having sinned—which you will not deny, conscience and Scripture uniting to establish the charge against you—is sufficient to put to flight all the complacency with which you have been accustomed to regard your moral state. But I say it, because if you examine what you so much admire and so much trust in,—if you try those qualities and actions which constitute your seeming goodness,—if you ask respecting each of them this simple question, Has God

been recognised in it?—you will immediately perceive that on every part of that on which you yourselves doated so fondly, and which figured so beautifully in the eye of the world, there is inscribed a virtual contempt, or an entire disregard, of the divine government. The essential excellence of what is done by a moral agent, consists in its recognition of the existence, and in its submission to the will, of Him who ruleth over all. And yet God has not been in all your thoughts, and God has not been in all your ways. Your abstinence from what is evil, and your cultivation of what is pure and lovely, have arisen from natural constitution, from a superior education, from external advantages, from secular motives, and from other causes of a similar kind. God has been either wholly left out of view in your course of acting, or he has been only allowed to hold a subordinate place. We see much that is estimable, much that is useful, much that is praiseworthy, and we see little that calls for censure, and nothing that is atrocious or base. But then, on penetrating beneath the surface, and applying the test of scriptural principle, we find that what you have done has not been done unto the Lord,—that what you are, you are not as in his sight,—that your best doings have been influenced neither by reverence for him as holy, nor by love to him as merciful,—and that from the ordinary exercise of your affections, and the every day business of your lives, he has been as systematically ex-

cluded as if he had no being in his own world, and no superintendence over his own creatures. And surely if you are possessed of the merest rudiments of religious knowledge, you must be aware, that this practical dethronement of God takes away all real or substantial value from the most virtuous character that can distinguish any of the sons or daughters of men. And the deep-seated and pervading guilt which such a consideration throws into it, is incalculably aggravated by your not only resting upon its merits with satisfaction and repose, but actually supposing it acceptable in the regard, and sufficient to secure the favour of that very Being whom it has so dishonoured, neglected, and disowned. If therefore, humility be indispensable for any, it must be especially indispensable for such of you as are described, to whatever extent, in the case now set before you. And your humility should be the profounder in his sight, since, though you acknowledged him not, and glorified him not as God, his eye was all the while upon your hearts and upon your goings, and regarding, with the minuteness of omniscience, and with the jealousy of sovereign power, your forgetfulness of his presence, and your rejection of his guidance and control.

But we must not neglect to remind you of that affecting display of the evil of sin, and of the degradation of the sinner, as these appear in the

sight of the Lord, which has been made in the cross of Christ. Christ was the Son of God, “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person ;” but he took upon him “the likeness of sinful flesh,” and he took upon him the burden of your transgressions, and he “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,”—suffering the malice of men, subjected to the ignominy of crucifixion, enduring the abandonment and the wrath of God, and overwhelmed with a sorrow that was like unto no other sorrow. And could such a sacrifice as this, think you, have been demanded by “the Father of mercies,” the possessor of infinite wisdom, the God of righteousness and justice, if it had not been necessary for the purpose for which it was required—the expiation of human guilt, and the deliverance of those to whom it attached, from the degradation and the ruin into which it had brought them ? And how immeasurably evil, therefore, must sin have been in the divine regard ; and to what a state of shameful and hopeless degeneracy must you have been reduced, when such a costly apparatus was requisite for your salvation ! Look, then, we say, to “Christ crucified ;” meditate at once on his dignity and his humiliation ; consider the relation which all this bears to your apostacy and sinfulness ; mark the demonstration which it affords of the number, and the aggravations, and the

consequences of those transgressions which are recorded against you in the register of heaven, and with which your souls are polluted, and with which your fate is burdened, though it may be that your consciences have not hitherto been alive even to their existence ;—and say, if there be any degree of self-abasement too great for you to cherish, any depth of humility too low for you to sink into in the sight of the Lord—if it does not become you, with broken hearts and contrite spirits, to stand afar off—to withhold your eyes from even looking up to the place where divine holiness and majesty are enthroned—and in the consciousness of what you are as beheld by the eye of an immaculate and all-seeing God, and as demonstrated to be by the agony and the shame of Calvary, to exclaim, “ Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee ? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, and my mouth in the dust, and I will be silent before thee, for my iniquity is too great for me to estimate ; I am altogether as an unclean thing, I have nothing but my sin and my misery to recommend me to thy notice. God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Nor think that an abasement so low as this puts you into a hopeless attitude—that the guilt which warrants and requires it must be too great to be forgiven—that it involves you in all the wretchedness of despair. He who commands you to humble yourselves, issues the command

not merely as a Holy God—that God against whom you have sinned—by sinning against whom you have dishonoured and ruined your nature—and before whom all wickedness should stand abashed as it stands condemned—but he issues it also as a compassionate God, who has thoughts of mercy towards you—who is desirous to preserve you from the disgrace, and from the punishment, and from the defilements of disobedience—and who prescribes to you the position of humility, not only as becoming your guilty character, but as requisite to make you at once willing to receive, and fit for receiving, the blessings of that redemption which, in the greatness and in the riches of his love, he has provided for our fallen race.

Had we nothing more to tell you than that you are sinners—that your guilt is very manifold, very aggravated, very shameful—that God is hiding his face from you in the greatness of his displeasure—that he cannot permit you to hold communion with himself or with his angels, but must banish you as worthless into the abodes of “outer darkness” and despair—and that, therefore, you have good reason to be humble, and to “abhor yourselves in dust and ashes;”—had we nothing more to tell you than this, our statement might be considered as both useless and cruel; it could yield you no benefit; it would only fill you with mortification, hopelessness, and anguish. But

after having told you all that we have to say of your sinful and degraded condition, we can add intelligence as pleasing and delightful, as that which went before it was depressing and painful. We can speak of blessings that are to follow in its train, and that are sufficient to compensate you a thousand-fold for all the distress which may have been inflicted upon your feelings, by our delineations of the abject and helpless state to which you are reduced as transgressors. And you may be more than reconciled to whatever is revolting in the latter, not merely because it is succeeded by all that is precious in the former, but also because it is the necessary preparation for your sure attainment and your complete fruition of it. We would persuade you to humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, that he may, in consequence, "lift you up." This is the arrangement established by the author of salvation. And though it might be enough to say, that God's appointment leaves no room for hesitation as to the duty and necessity of self-abasement, yet we will find the appointment founded on the principles of our nature, and on the relation subsisting between the grace inculcated in the text and the advantage by which it is to be accompanied, and will thus be satisfied, that compliance with the Apostle's exhortation comes recommended to us by its own reasonableness, as well as enforced upon us by divine authority.

You must not suppose that humility is an attainment, on account of which, as if there were any thing meritorious or efficient in it, the promised exaltation will be conferred upon you. If scriptural and genuine, it is a quality which, in its very nature, excludes all such imaginations. It grows out of, or it consists in, a strong and impressive sense of utter emptiness as to all that can deserve one token of divine goodness, and a distinct, unqualified renunciation of every thing on which such a claim could be made to rest. He whom it distinguishes, may confidently look for the blessing annexed to it in the declaration of the text. But he cannot and he will not expect that blessing as a just reward. Were you really brought back to God, and living as his people, and abounding in the holy work which he has assigned them, still the spirit of humility would dictate the acknowledgment, that after all you were "unprofitable servants." And surely the humility that precedes such a change, and such a reformation, can never be compatible with the feeling and the plea of good desert, or allow you to maintain that you have a title to the smallest favour, not to speak of the richest mercies, which God has to bestow.

The humility that is enjoined is connected with the privilege that is to follow it, in another way than that of either natural or acquired right. The connection is just as necessary, but it

is of a different kind. When the sinner is made humble, he is merely undergoing a part of that moral process which must take place, in order that he may be raised from the death of sin to the life of holiness and peace. Nor is it difficult to perceive how indispensable it is, in order that Christianity may have its perfect and ultimate effect upon you. If you have formed a high estimate of your own worth and ability—if you proudly imagine either that your sinfulness is not so great as the Scripture represents it to be, or that you can work out a deliverance from it by your personal energies—if you do not cherish those convictions and sentiments with respect to your evil deserts, and your sad degeneracy, and your miserable helplessness, which are called for by the truth of your circumstances, and in order to meet which the Gospel of God your Saviour has been devised and revealed—then you can neither recognise the value and necessity of this gracious plan, nor acquiesce cordially in its leading arrangements, nor relish its blessings as equally suitable and requisite, nor even aspire to that state of pardon, and purification, and honour, and felicity, to which it is intended by its divine author to raise or to restore you. But if you feel and cherish that humbleness of mind which just conceptions of your guilty, and depraved, and wretched condition are calculated to generate—if you see yourselves in that light in which the Lord regards you when

he interposes in your behalf, and contrives a plan of emancipation adapted to your circumstances—if you are so lowered in your own esteem as to perceive nothing for you in the resources of combined humanity, nothing for you but in the condescension, and pity, and power of Him whose indignation you had provoked—and if in the midst of this self-reproach, this self-distrust, this self-abasement, you are ready to throw your fortunes entirely and unreservedly upon the merits of that dispensation which divine grace offers to you as your sole and all-sufficient refuge—then there is no insuperable barrier between you and the salvation which you need. The devices of God's wisdom become acceptable to you—the offers of his mercy become welcome to you—the hopes of his favour become precious to you—the whole manifestation of his redeeming love becomes available to you. And lying low at the foot of the cross and at the throne of grace, he beholds in you the very persons who are worthy, because you are willing and ready to receive, just as he has provided them, all the virtue which emanates from the cross, and all the blessings which, for its sake, are dispensed from the throne.

Humble yourselves, therefore, in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up. He will rescue you from the degradation and wretchedness in which you are involved by your sins. He will elevate you to that place from which you had fallen

down, and in which it was the great purpose of his mercy to reinstate you, as a place of acceptance, and favour, and blessedness. He will pardon you through the atoning efficacy of that blood, to which your humility has guided you, in the exercise of faith, as the only means by which your guilt could be cancelled. He will sanctify you by that Spirit, for dependence upon and submission to whose divine influence you were prepared, by those lowly convictions which you cherished of your thorough depravity, and utter want of self-regenerating power. And after having communicated to you all the spiritual blessings and consolations which a profound sense of your need of them, and a believing and prayerful application for them to Him who alone has them to impart, had fitted you for at once receiving and enjoying, he will introduce you into that world of purity and bliss for which you have become meet by humbly placing yourselves under the direction, casting yourselves upon the grace, and surrendering yourselves to the disposal of God, who has put especial honour on them that are lowly in heart, and who, in the exercise of wisdom as well as of sovereignty, has decreed and declared that every one "that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

And as I would address the exhortation and the promise of the text to sinners, that they may be saved, so I would address it also to saints,

even in the most advanced stage of their progress towards glory. Humility lies at the very foundation of your Christian character and of your Christian hopes. And the moment that you fail in the cultivation of it, that moment your character is impaired and your hopes become unstable. Remember that God, in whom must be all your confidence, and from whom cometh all your expectation, “resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” Crush every rising of pride, therefore, that God may not turn away his regards from you, or may not set himself in opposition to you. And cherish a growing humility, that you may have a deeper feeling of your need of divine grace, and that you may supplicate it with greater earnestness, and that you may receive more liberal supplies of it from the fountain which alone can send it forth. Thus humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up—he will raise you higher and higher in the scale of spiritual excellence, and at last he will exalt you to his heavenly presence.

SERMON VIII.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

REV. iii. 19.

“Be zealous.”

It is evident from the context that the zeal which is here recommended or enjoined has religion for its object. Now there are some who are mightily afraid of zeal as connected with religion. They have no great objection to the warmth and eagerness of feeling which that term implies being manifested in other departments of human activity. A zealous friend—a zealous teacher—a zealous patriot—are characters referred to with expressions of applause, and held up as examples for imitation. But the moment that zeal mingles with religion, then there is distrust, and apprehension, and disapproval. The zealous Christian is a person who, in the estimation of those we speak of, has lost some portion of his rationality, if not of his integrity; if not decried as a hypocrite, he is at least laughed at as a fool—whom,

on the one supposition or on the other, they carefully avoid themselves, and against whom they with equal anxiety warn their families and their friends, as unworthy acquaintance, or as dangerous associates.

It is curious to observe how differently zeal in matters of religion is spoken of by these persons, and by the word of God. To its guidance they gravely affect to submit their judgment and their conduct. And yet it never throws out an insinuation, or utters a syllable that is unfavourable to religious zeal ; never holds up those who are remarkable for that quality as deserving either of ridicule or reproach ; never says any thing respecting them, as if they should be distrusted, or shunned, or even pitied, on account of it. On the contrary, it represents that quality as so essential, that we cannot do without it, exhorts us to acquire and to cultivate it, and condemns us if it finds no place in our heart and deportment. Christ is here introduced as rebuking the church of Laodicea for the want of it, and as commanding them to get that want supplied. And there is no circumstance either known or imaginable, which should prevent his language from being applied, with the same import, and the same authority, to the members of every church that presents to his eye the same character he discovered in the Laodiceans. If we have no zeal in religion, we are subject to his

displeasure ; and if we would comply with his righteous will, we must be zealous.

But his will, as thus expressed, is not arbitrary. It is founded in the nature and reason of the case, and must commend itself to your unprejudiced understanding, and to your sense of propriety and consistency, and to your regard for what is good. Why, let me ask you, are you zealous for any thing whatever ? Is it not because that thing, in your opinion, is important to be attained, and because the attainment of it requires energy and effort ? Is not this the reason that you would naturally assign to any one who might wonder at your eagerness, and inquire into the causes of it ? And would not any one be satisfied that you did right, if the importance of the thing, and the obstacles to its acquisition, were truly such as you had alleged ? Now, can you explain how it is that the same mode of judging and acting should not be adopted in religion ?

In the *first* place, is religion destitute of importance, or is it less important than any thing else which attracts your notice, and interests your attention ? Is it to be ranked among those pursuits which may be taken up and laid down at pleasure—which may be heeded or neglected, without much advantage on the one hand, or much inconvenience on the other ? Would you have us to say or to think, that religion is of so

little moment in your esteem? O no; you would be offended at this, and would repel it as an unfounded and injurious calumny. And you would frankly acknowledge that religion is momentous both in its nature and in its consequences; and you would even be forward to maintain that it is more momentous than any other subject that can occupy your minds, or than all other subjects put together. And when you conceded or asserted this, you would be doing nothing more than what necessarily flows from a deep felt conviction that religion is not an airy speculation or a cunning fable, but a system of unfeigned reality, and demonstrated truth, and eternal obligation.

Then, in the *second* place, do you consider religion to be of such easy acquirement that a man may be invested with all its character, and animated by all its spirit, and come to the enjoyment of all its blessings, though he gives himself no great concern about it, and treats it with coldness and indifference? Will it come to him in all its power, and excellence, and benefit, without any earnest desire on his part, without any vigorous struggle, without any active and persevering exertions? Is there nothing in the natural disinclination of his heart towards it—nothing in the number and strength of those outward temptations which allure him away from it—nothing in the malice and force of his enemies who try to

make him renounce and hate it—nothing in the kind and extent of those requisitions which it makes upon his affections, and his obedience, and his time, and his talents, and his property, if he would become in a sufficient degree conformable to it;—is there nothing in all this which urges upon him the impossibility of answering its demands and obtaining its rewards, if he indulges in listlessness and sloth? You cannot reply to these questions candidly without allowing that in prosecuting the work of religion, so as to prosecute it with ultimate success, there are difficulties and dangers to be encountered of no ordinary magnitude, and that the victory over these is not to be gained by the careless and supine. Although it must be by superior, by divine aid, that you reach the great end which it sets before you, and to which it directs your ambition, still that aid will not be granted to him who lays his arms across in idleness, or who takes no lively interest in the pursuit of it. The grace of God operates by means which you are instructed to employ, and his grace will not be imparted either to give efficacy to these means or to bestow what they should be instrumental in securing for you, so long as you neglect to use them at all, or use them with sluggishness and apathy.

And then, in the *third* place, if for the reasons now stated, we ought to be zealous in acquiring for ourselves an interest in the grace and blessings

of the Gospel, the same reasons should constrain us to be zealous also in communicating these to our fellow-men throughout the world. Religion is as important to them as it is to us. The divine glory is as much concerned in their subjection to its sway, as it is in ours. They are as unable as we to become partakers of its benefits, without a wise and strenuous use of the appointed means, and without such a persevering struggle as may in due time overcome the difficulties, which are connected with that acquisition. While, therefore, it is a duty of strong obligation and of hard performance to convey Christianity to others, so as that it may be the instrument of their redemption, surely zeal in the discharge of it is both incumbent and requisite. And is it possible for us to have any true zeal in prosecuting the sacred task, so long as it results merely in our own improvement and happiness, if that same affection is not awakened within us, and does not influence our conduct, when we strive to rescue the guilty mortals that are around us from the evils of sin, and to bring them into the light of life, the liberty of God's children, the heaven-ward path of righteousness? Can we feel the compassion for them which a sense of their miserable circumstances is fitted to excite, and which the love of Christ must cherish in all those who believe that he died for their salvation, without being ardent both in our desires and in our labours to procure for them

the spiritual advantages which they must have or perish? And can we hope to succeed at all in the exertions we make for that purpose, or to succeed in them to any tolerable extent, unless they are dictated and pervaded by a passionate sympathy with those whom we are studying to befriend, and by that fervour of resolution and of feeling which such a holy enterprise naturally kindles and obviously requires?

Whether, therefore, you take into account the *importance* of religion, or the *difficulties* to be surmounted in getting its genuine character, and its final recompense, and whether you consider religion as the subject of your own personal concern, or consider it as a dispensation which you should be instrumental in conveying to others, you have here the very same motives which call forth and justify your zeal in other cases. And if you are actuated by zeal in other cases, and feel it to be at once becoming and necessary, we may well require you to vindicate, if you can, a want of zeal or a condemnation of it, in that vocation wherewith you are called as the disciples of Christ. If it be right to cherish and display zeal in the study of literature and philosophy, in promoting the prosperity of your country, in advancing the welfare of your friends, upon what principle can it be wrong to cherish and display zeal in procuring for religion that ascendancy which it is entitled to hold over the minds and destinies of those for whose everlasting happi-

ness it is intended? You cannot, without abandoning the profession which you have often made, deny that it is superior to all other concerns in which you are or can be engaged. Either then be as zealous for it as you are for them; or have the goodness to explain to us why it is, that you are not so. Just solve this problem arising out of your own conduct, why warm feelings, passionate language, and animated efforts, should be so laudable in the common business of the world, or in the nobler achievements of heroism, and yet should be reckoned out of place and liable to censure in the great duties of religion. Just show us why the two things should be so differently regarded and so differently treated in this respect, when there avowedly is no difference in those circumstances which naturally call forth our zeal, or which render the exercise of it indispensable; and thus prevent us from holding what must, we fear, after all, be deemed the true cause of this seeming paradox—namely, that religion is far less the object of your attachment than are the other objects which you pursue with so much ardour and activity, or that you are not sufficiently impressed with a sense of its importance, or that you have not experienced its commanding power, or that you are not fully aware of the steepness and ruggedness of the ascent which must be climbed by every true aspirant to the prize of its high calling.

Supposing you to be as dull and frigid in temporal as you are in spiritual things, still that would not absolve you from this weighty charge. It would, indeed, be unnatural and hurtful to be altogether indifferent even to the former, though there your indifference would be less marvellous and more easily forgiven. But indifference to the latter is in no point of view excusable, and must not only be most injurious but utterly fatal. Considered in the light of eternity, temporal things may justly cease to excite any powerful emotions, or to give rise to any energetic doings. But considered in any light in which they can be contemplated, spiritual things must always wear the aspect of vast importance, and possess a powerful claim on us for lively feeling, and for active endeavours. And, consequently, be as unconcerned as you may about all that usually occupies men of the world, yet if you profess Christianity, and are unconcerned about it also, your character carries in its bosom a palpable, a sinful, and a ruinous contradiction.

Only observe what our Saviour says to you on the inconsistency which you exhibit between your actual conduct and your sacred professions. "I would," says Christ, "that you were either cold or hot." You are not altogether cold, for you have taken upon you the Christian name—you own the authority and the doctrine of that divine person from whom your distinctive name is derived—you say that you expect salvation through his

merits, and that you acquiesce in that dispensation of grace and holiness by which he proposes to lead you to heaven. You do all this, but then you do no more. There is no principle of vitality to move and animate that body of religious profession which you have put on. There is no corresponding sentiment pervading and quickening the soul. There is no putting forth of the active powers of your nature, in order to give distinct meaning and substantial effect to your pretensions. There is no proof afforded, by the diligence and forwardness with which you seek after the things concerning which your profession is made, of your sincerely believing them to exist, or of your earnestly desiring to possess them. And this being the case, it would be more for the honour of that Master whom you pretend to serve, and more for your own consistency and safety, would you entirely give up the profession of religion you have assumed, and honestly declare you have no faith in it, no love to it, no expectation from it. The lukewarmness you evince can be of no real advantage to you; in the sight of God, and as to future retribution, it is equivalent to absolute coldness, or to a decided renunciation of Christianity. Nay it is more, for while it brings along with it none of the benefits peculiar to Christianity, but leaves you as destitute of them as if your unbelief were avowed, it adds to your guilt and your

danger all that belongs to a hypocritical, a thoughtless, or an interested assumption of that which cannot be so assumed without aggravated impiety and increased demerit. And if a want of zeal in religion be thus no better or even worse than acknowledged infidelity, and if it be so in the judgment of your heavenly king, what ideas must you entertain of your own state, on the supposition that you not only are not zealous, but that you denounce this property of the religious character as an evil, deprecate it in yourselves, and censure it in other men! Surely you have yet much to learn, and much to experience as Christians. It is utterly inconceivable upon what ground you can satisfy yourselves of your Christianity, when, so far from its rousing you to any fervour either of sentiment or of action, you studiously repress and systematically oppose all such fervour as foreign to the nature of Christianity, and hostile to your personal improvement. In this you do nothing else than say that Christianity, which you allow to be of great importance, should be treated as if it were of little or no importance, and that though its blessings cannot be reached or diffused without extraordinary exertions, yet in aiming at the possession and dissemination of them, all such exertions must be avoided as unsuitable and perilous. We can imagine nothing more absurd and preposterous than this mode of dealing with the subject. And being at complete variance with your own con-

duct in cases where there is no temptation to be perverse, and unequivocally condemned by the emphatic declarations of Christ, it must be traced to a radical defect in your views and principles in reference to religion, and should lead to a most serious and thorough investigation into the state of your hearts before God.

But this is a very imperfect statement of the doctrine. If religion be, as it is described in the Bible, and as you yourselves profess to regard it, then not only ought you to be zealous for it, but your zeal for it cannot be too great. Excessive zeal for religion never was, and never can be realized. This position may startle those who have been accustomed to think of religious zeal with aversion. But it is nevertheless true, and must be admitted, if we admit any thing at all on the subject. If it be right to have zeal because religion is important, and cannot be successfully cultivated without it, then unquestionably our zeal must be proportioned in its degree to the degree of importance which belongs to the object that excites it, and to the difficulty with which that object may be secured. Now what is the degree of importance that belongs to religion? Why, it is *infinitely* important. Not only is it more so than all the other pursuits to which mankind can devote themselves, but it is more so than any thing which the imagination can picture as entering into human thought, or oc-

cupying human activity. It is important beyond all comparison with what either exists or can be fancied. What are the evils from which it is necessary to deliver you? They are evils unutterable in their magnitude, and unending in their duration. What are the blessings which it is requisite to secure for you? They are blessings too large for the heart of man to conceive, and that last through eternity. What has God done to save you from the one, and to make you partakers of the other? He has given his own Son to incarnation, and suffering, and death. And in what terms does his word speak of the salvation of the soul as thus provided for? In terms which, though flowing from the pen of inspiration, are confessedly inadequate to convey to us any considerable portion of that meaning with which the subject is pregnant, and all of which is to be finally realized in the experience of every one who shall be admitted into heaven. What are the difficulties which you have to encounter in aiming at it, and which you have to surmount before it can be yours? They are within you, and without you, and round about you; they are countless in their number—they are formidable in their strength—they are unceasing in their opposition and influence—and the very least of them, if unresisted and unsubdued, will be sufficient to deprive you of your reward.

And in the face of all this, can it be that any

man who really believes the Bible, and is sincere in his Christian profession, should think of setting bounds beyond which our religious zeal must not pass? What! can you be too zealous in seeking after deliverance from “the worm that never dies, and from the fire that shall not be quenched.” Can you be too zealous in aspiring to that “inheritance which is incorruptible, and that crown of glory which fadeth not away?” Can you be too zealous in the pursuit of what was purchased at such a costly price as the blood of the incarnate Son of God? Can you be too zealous in labouring to fulfil the obligations of love and obedience, arising from such a manifestation of the divine mercy? Can you be too zealous in avoiding the snares, in resisting the enemies, in breaking down the barriers, that would interrupt your progress towards such a consummation as the one set before you in the Gospel, or that would disqualify you for the final enjoyment of it? Or can you be too zealous in adding to your own participation of the benefits which Christianity has in store for all who embrace her, that of your brethren of mankind to whom Christianity is yet a stranger, in removing the obstacles by which they have been hitherto prevented from receiving what she has to bestow, and in employing the necessary means for giving her the triumph which she loves to gain over the hearts of perishing sinners, and for

making them the trophies of her saving might. No, my friends, no zeal can be inordinate which prosecutes such objects, and moves in such a path. There is doubtless a zeal that may be carried too far ; but that is not a zeal for true religion. It is a zeal for something accidentally connected with religion—or it is a zeal for one part instead of the whole of it—or it is a zeal expressing itself in a way that is neither requisite nor legitimate. Such abuses do exist, and it is highly necessary that you guard against them. But there can be no limits set to your zeal for true religion, pursued in its own native excellence and just proportions, and pursued under the guidance of its own spirit and its own precepts. You cannot possibly be too zealous in working out the salvation of your immortal souls. You cannot possibly be too zealous in serving and glorifying the God who made you. You cannot possibly be too zealous in manifesting your gratitude to the Redeemer who died for your salvation. You cannot possibly be too zealous in giving to, or in doing for your fellow-creatures what is indispensable, not merely for their present comfort, but also for their everlasting happiness.

We say this not merely on account of the incalculable moment of religion, and the many difficulties through which it has to struggle, but also because the Bible rule goes to that extent.

Do we ever find the Bible checking and discouraging the zeal of the people of God? It contains maxims by which their zeal ought to be regulated in its aim and in its operations. But it nowhere proceeds on the supposition that zeal for truth, and holiness, and immortality, can be carried to an immoderate length. On the contrary, it speaks to us as if we were in constant danger of coming short in the exercise of that virtue, and therefore perpetually enforces it upon us, and enforces it upon us in the most explicit and emphatic terms. It requires us to "love God with all our heart and soul, and strength, and mind"—to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"—to "do whatever our hand finds, with our might"—to be "zealous of good works"—to "contend earnestly for the faith"—to "press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And it requires us thus to practise zeal, not till we arrive at any particular stage, or till we get out of any particular embarrassment, when we may sleep and take our rest, but at every stage of our progress, and in all the circumstances in which we are placed. Nor does it qualify its numerous and forcible exhortations with one word of caution, as if we were in any hazard of reaching a very exalted measure of zeal, or as if by that we would do any harm either to our own spiritual well-being, or to the sacred cause which we have espoused. There are a

thousand arguments and precepts urging us to be zealous in religion ; there is not a single syllable warning us to be on our guard against being too zealous.

In this view we are fortified by looking to the best and most authoritative examples. Was there any thing measured in the zeal of the Psalmist when his soul longed and thirsted for the courts of God's house—when he praised the Lord with all his heart in the congregations of the righteous—when he fought for the defence and the prosperity of Israel—and when rivers of waters run down his eyes for sorrow, and his spirit was consumed with indignation, while witnessing the contempt which was shown to the divine law ? Was there any limit to the zeal of Christ, of whom it was said prophetically, and of whom it was almost a literal characteristic,—“ that the zeal of God's house had eaten him up”—who shrunk from no peril, and declined no toil, that he might “ finish the work which his father had given him to do”—whose meat and whose drink and whose delight it was “ to do the will of Him that sent him”—and in whom there was such a burning desire to destroy sin, and to save men, and to glorify God, that many waters of affliction could not quench it, and that all the floods of divine wrath could not drown it ? Was there any moderation in the zeal of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, who scrupled not to make every sacrifice of reputa-

tion and interest and comfort, that he might be a partaker of the great salvation—whose “spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the Athenians so wholly given to idolatry,”—who “preached the unsearchable riches of Christ” in the face of the mightiest and most malevolent opposition—who prayed, and watched, and toiled, and suffered with all the energy he could command, and never “counted himself to have apprehended”—who, in the vehemence of his Christian sympathy, wished himself accursed for the sake of his kinsmen according to the flesh—who abounded in labours more and more every day, and was in deaths often, and “counted not his life dear to him, that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God?” Was there any thing cool or calculating in the zeal of all those holy martyrs, who bore their fearless testimony to “the truth as it is in Jesus”—who “took joyfully the spoiling of their goods” for the sake of the Gospel—who stood nobly forward as the champions of saving doctrine and practical godliness amidst prevailing error and profligacy—who had their ardour kindled into a brighter and intenser flame by the very opposition they encountered—and who, through good and through bad report, followed their divine Master to the depths of ignominy and to the suffering of death? No—in these instances we discern no traces of that

timid and fearful policy by which certain people would restrain our Christian zeal, and have us to be always alarmed by the apprehension of its going to excess. Those holy persons to whom we have alluded, did certainly “walk in wisdom,” and were under the guidance of enlightened views, but still they were exceeding zealous, and it was in consequence of this that, with God’s blessing, they were more than conquerors over all the opposition that they had to combat, held fast their integrity and their faith, and finally entered into their rest.

And what think you, my friends, would those who have gone through all their trials and tribulations, and are now rejoicing before the throne of God, say to you on the subject of religious zeal, as experienced and exhibited by themselves in their passage through the wilderness? Supposing that any thing like regret could affect their perfected spirits, would they regret that in any one case, or in any one degree, they had been too zealous in travelling the road to heaven? O no; they might regret that their zeal had been sometimes mistaken in its direction, and sometimes mistaken in its modes of expression; but never that it had been carried too far in prosecuting the holy and celestial purposes which have at length terminated in “an endless life.” They might regret that they had been often deterred from showing it by that “fear of man

which bringeth a snare," or tempted to restrain it by disinclination to activity, and aversion to suffering ; but never, never, could they regret that they had been too zealous in seeking after the blessings of salvation, in honouring their God and Redeemer, in preparing for the life and immortality to which they are now exalted. Could you hear them addressing you on this subject—they would be just repeating the precept of the text, and giving it all the force and emphasis which it could derive from their earthly experience, and from their heavenly reward. They would call upon you to bring all your faculties into vigorous operation—and never for a moment to let your exertions languish, till you had become meet to join them in their blest abodes. They would assure you that such as declaimed against vehemence of action in this momentous work, were ignorant of its value and of its arduousness, or had no realising views of the recompense by which its successful performance is to be crowned. They would tell you that you could not be too zealous to keep yourselves from sin—that you could not be too zealous in manifesting your attachment to that Saviour whose glory they now behold, and in whose presence they now rejoice—that you could not be too zealous in honouring and serving that God, of whom they now enjoy a beatific vision—that you could not be too zealous in cultivating all those dispositions of mind

and habits of character which qualify for the exercises in which they are now engaged, and for the happiness of which they now partake—that you could not be too zealous in propagating the Gospel among the myriads that are still in ignorance and alienation, and thus adding to the multitude of redeemed spirits with whom they now associate in singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Be zealous, then, my Christian friends, and be zealous to the full extent of your powers and opportunities. Pray to God that he would send his Spirit to fire you yet more and more with the ambition of pleasing him, and of doing all his holy will. And habitually set before you those considerations by which you shall be animated to the undivided and unwearied pursuit of all that can adorn you here, and of all that can make you blessed hereafter.

And let the enemies of Christian zeal take warning ere it be too late—for “if the righteous,” with all their zeal, “scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly appear,” and how can the lukewarm professors of the Gospel escape the wrath, or attain the joys to come?

SERMON IX.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

REV. iii. 19.

“Be zealous.”

OUR first discourse on these words was occupied in showing that zeal in religion is as natural and as necessary as zeal in any other pursuit, which is at once important and difficult ; and, that as the importance of religion is infinite, and as the difficulties of cultivating it in all its requisite extent are incalculably great, it is quite impossible for us to be, properly speaking, too zealous for it. Our zeal may be excessive, if it fix upon something which is only united with religion by some accidental or adventitious tie ; or it may be excessive when it operates for a part only, and not the whole of religion ; or it may be excessive by expressing itself in a way which religion neither needs nor sanctions. But there can be no limits set to the degree of our zeal for true religion, pursued in its own native excellence and just proportions, and pursued under the guidance

of its own spirit and its own precepts. We may be satisfied of this from the nature of the case, and from the language of Scripture, and from the example of Christ, and of all whose example is worthy of imitation. The danger lies wholly on the side of defect and shortcoming. We are in no hazard at all of going beyond safe and legitimate bounds. And those who are perpetually guarding themselves and warning their friends against being too zealous in religion, are either ignorant of what genuine religion is, or have no impressive belief in its truth and reality. How can it be, that we should be too zealous in doing what is necessary to escape the wrath to come, and obtain admission into the kingdom of heaven?

It is not enough, however, that we have established this point. There are many considerations, bearing upon it, and connected with it, which must be diligently attended to, in order that our zeal may be as efficient and as perfect as possible. Though we positively deny that, when right in itself, it can ever be inordinate in its measure, yet we as positively maintain, that, in order to its forming an acceptable part of our Christian character, and in order to its being available to the great ends for which it is to be felt and cherished, it must be subjected to the government of certain principles and maxims. While, on the one hand, without these, it might

not only prove useless, but mischievous,—so, on the other hand, by the help of them it will acquire a purer tone, and a higher power, and a more successful operation on our conduct and our fate. The misapprehensions and the recklessness of many whom it actuates, or by whom it is exhibited, have brought a bad reputation on the thing itself, and caused its most enlightened votaries to be regarded with jealousy and aversion; and at the same time have retarded rather than promoted their own progress in the ways of Christianity. And though, after what we have advanced as to its degree, any thing proposed in the way of control or regulation may appear like a departure from our great primary position, yet it will be found that the very contrary is the truth, and that by putting our zeal under proper direction and management, we shall not only add to its ardour and its efficacy in our own individual case, but also recommend it to the forbearance, the respect, and the imitation of those who otherwise might be offended at every action that it pervaded, and at every person whom it characterized.

1. The *first* remark that I would offer to your attention is, that our zeal for religion should be real and conscientious.

There is a zeal of sympathy, which is awakened and kept alive by the zeal of others with whom we happen to come in contact or to asso-

ciate. We catch the spirit which they breathe—we join in the enterprizes which they begin—and we are insensibly carried along with them in that path of exertion which they are treading from the native impulse of their minds—so that we present the very same aspect which they wear, and get the very same credit to which they are entitled.

There is a zeal of animal feeling, which is quite constitutional with those who experience it—which rises as regularly and certainly as they have any thing to do,—which determines them to be active and strenuous in every business with which they are called to interfere, and will sometimes lead them to make efforts and sacrifices in the pursuit of their object, which men of real worth would be apt to startle at as extravagant or impracticable.

There is a zeal of sentimentality, which has no existence when those whom it distinguishes look at things as they really are—in their plain and unexaggerated form, but which is produced by their contriving to throw a great deal of romantic interest into what could not otherwise move them, and converting the business of religion into a mere matter of keen and high-wrought feeling, which cannot be gratified, without using at all times the language of passion, and indulging in actions that are more remarkable for the

warmth of their complexion, than for the utility of their effects.

And there is a zeal of affectation, which has its seat in the phraseology and outward demeanour of those who profess it, but no counterpart in the affections of the heart—which is feigned to answer some purpose of vanity or selfishness—which is coupled with indifference, or it may be with hostility, to that which it pretends to serve—and still seeking after some object of paltry ambition, invites the world to admire its doings, like Jehu, the king of Israel, when he said, under the influence of a similar assumption, “Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.”

Now all this is wrong. There is here, properly speaking, no zeal for religion. Religion, in its genuine sense, is not the thing in view. There is no distinct perception of it—no cordial attachment to it—no sincere seeking after it. The zeal of sympathy is little else than a mechanical movement, produced by a sort of external constraint, not by an inward desire or resolution, and as far removed from the quality which is known by that name as the advance of the soldier is from the virtue of courage, when, though in spirit a coward, he yet allows himself to be hurried by his brave companions into the heat and dangers of the battle. The zeal of animal feeling is nothing better than an instinct—a pe-

cularity in the natural temper which may be useful when bestirred in a good cause, but no more allied to moral virtue than is the strength of the arms, or the swiftness of the feet, or any other faculty of the bodily frame. The zeal of sentimentality does not recognise religion as it is found in the word of God, but must be created and nourished by a partial or fictitious representation of it, and becomes extinct as soon as it is contemplated in its native simplicity and sober truth. And the zeal of affectation is just a branch of that hypocrisy, which is the negation of all excellence and the cover for all deformity, and is not more expressly condemned by Scripture, than it is odious in itself, and pernicious in its consequences.

That zeal which is inculcated in the text is something of whose existence we are conscious—which, when exhibited outwardly, is a fair and honest demonstration of what is felt within us—which does not merely show itself to the eye of men, but is discerned and acknowledged by the all-seeing and deep-searching eye of God. It is occupied, not with what is merely supposed or imagined, but with what is ascertained and received as true. It is kindled by a strong conviction of the vast and incalculable importance of that towards the attainment of which it is directed, and by the profound interest that is taken in those great and precious blessings which the

Christian is taught by the Gospel to aspire to. And thus emanating from the combined workings of the judgment and the heart, it forms a constituent part of the character ; becomes as familiar to our minds as the doctrine we believe, or the duty we perform ; and while it fails not to appear in the whole of our ostensible deportment, so far as opportunities are afforded for its exhibition, maintains its dominion in the soul, and burns within us, even when it can be known only to our own consciences, and to him from whom nothing can be hid.

Now, my friends, let me ask you if you are zealous ? Do you think that you are zealous ? Are you esteemed so by others ? Be not contented with having manifested this quality to your fellow-men—so far as that you have been ardent and forward in the cause of religion—that there has been a fervour in your feelings, and in your language, and in your conduct—and that you have, through its means, achieved many great and difficult things, and established your reputation among the witnesses of your exploits. Be not contented with all this—but search and try yourselves, and let it be your ambition, your endeavour, and your prayer, to be animated with real and heart-felt zeal. Be “renewed in the spirit of your minds,” that religion may appear to you in all its genuine excellence, and that it may hold that place in your regard to which it is

justly entitled. Be strong in the faith that it has "God for its author, and salvation for its end." Meditate seriously on the interest which you personally have in all that it requires you to believe, and in all that it commands you to do. Think of its necessity to the redemption and well-being of every one of the human race. Ponder on the strength, and the extent, and the permanence of those obligations under which you lie, to honour and obey the God whom it represents as pitying you in your guilt, and the Saviour whom it holds out as having given his life as a ransom for your souls. Let your views stretch forward into eternity, that you may anticipate the momentous results in which the neglect and the observance of it shall severally terminate. And pray that these things may be brought home to you with such power by the divine Spirit, as that every feeling shall be roused, and every faculty called forth in its behalf, and that religion and zeal for religion shall be as inseparably united in your experience, as they are united in the precepts and system of Christianity.

2. Our zeal for religion must not only be real and sincere, it must also be intelligent, or accompanied with knowledge.

There is no sentiment to which we can safely or worthily give effect, if we are ignorant of that about which it is conversant. This ignorance will lead us into egregious, perhaps fatal mistakes, and

may totally pervert what was good in itself, and calculated to be useful in its influence. It is thus with religious zeal fully as much as with any thing else. Zeal is a feeling of much potency ; its impulses are strong ; its operations are vigorous, and intended to be resistless ; so that it requires to be directed only towards objects that are legitimate, and against those barriers which oppose its progress. If it aims at what is undeserving, or uses means that are unsuitable, it will in the one case effectuate a mischief by its success, and in the other case it will fail to accomplish that desirable end which it has in view. Nothing is more essential to its safety and its efficiency than a thorough acquaintance both with what it proposes to achieve, and with the methods by which the achievement is to be most completely wrought out.

Now when we speak of zeal for religion, it is not enough to use that comprehensive term. We must have distinct ideas of what it means. And these are to be acquired, not by a vague contemplation of it as a whole, but by an accurate analysis of its system, and a particular consideration of its component parts. It may be said, indeed, that we believe Christianity in general, that we love it in general, that we obey it in general, that we propagate it in general, and, of course, that we are zealous for it in general. But this general notion of it can be thus entertained

only because it is the result of an attention, more or less minute, to the various truths and precepts of which it consists. And it is only when we have so studied these as to understand their import, that we can be zealous in believing, in loving, in obeying, and in propagating that to which they belong. We may be sensible of a strong attachment to religion, and we may be very zealous for its influence and prosperity. But what is the use of our zeal if we are mistaken as to what religion is—if we pursue the shadow instead of the substance—if we devote to error those practical regards which we owe to truth alone? And what becomes of our zeal, if, having the most correct views of that which we should seek to attain, we are yet ignorant of the way by which these views may be most fully and satisfactorily realized, either as to ourselves or as to those whose spiritual welfare we are anxious to promote? In such a case our zeal, being misdirected, will have all its energies wasted; no substantial advantage can be derived from its mightiest operations; and, though nothing but good is intended, nothing but evil may be accomplished by it. To prevent such an empty or such a disastrous result, and to secure the contrary benefits, we must take care that our minds be enlightened on the whole subject—that we have clear notions of the nature and importance of Christianity—that we examine and ascertain

the properties by which it is rendered so interesting and so indispensable to those for whom it is revealed, and that we be aware of the best and most eligible mode of making it available to the great purposes which it is designed to answer.

Many examples may be adduced to illustrate this. The apostle Paul, previous to his conversion, was "zealous towards God." But at that period, his was a zeal originating in ignorance of that subject concerning which it was manifested. He thought that the religion of Jesus was an imposture, and regarded it as a system of impious and hostile bearing against the divine economy of Moses. And therefore he set himself in opposition to the Christians, and "made havoc of the church," and went about "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," and being "exceedingly mad against them," "beyond measure he persecuted the church of God and wasted it." In all this he was quite sincere, and acted from the conviction, "that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And he persevered in his blind career till it pleased God, whose cause he flattered himself he was promoting, to remove the scales from his eyes, and to "reveal his Son in him," and to send him to preach to Jews and to Gentiles with an equally ardent, but a

far more enlightened zeal, "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

This apostle, when speaking of Israel in the 10th chapter of his epistle to the Romans, has these words, "For I bear them record, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." He testifies to the sincerity of their zeal, and he testifies to the goodness of that general object in reference to which their zeal was employed. And yet they were quite wrong; and continuing to be so, through the want of candid inquiry and sound examination, their zeal would go for nothing, or, rather, would have the effect of increasing their delusion and hastening their ruin. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness," adds the apostle, "and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." They were desirous to be saved, and to be saved according to the will of God. So far their zeal was good and commendable; but then they mistook the will of God concerning their salvation. They conceived that it was by their own doings that they were to enjoy his favour. They had imperfect and inadequate conceptions of the purity of his character, of the strictness of his law, and of the plan by which he provided for the sinner's justification; and they laboured to establish a claim to that blessing by their personal obedience, manifested in observing

the moral precepts and ceremonial expiations prescribed by the Mosaic law, instead of humbly and submissively trusting in that all-perfect and all-sufficient obedience which Christ had yielded, and which God had appointed, for the redemption and happiness of our fallen race. The consequence of this inevitably was, that with all their zeal for God they could not be delivered from his wrath or obtain everlasting life ; and at that very moment the apostle was pouring forth his earnest prayer for their salvation, as it was his constant endeavour to give them that instruction in the truths of religion, which was necessary to make their earnestness about it conducive to their ultimate felicity.

This instance which we have quoted from the Jews is not peculiar to *them*. The very same misapprehension on the very same point is to be found among many in our own day, of whose zeal we cannot entertain a doubt. And, surely, if the judgment of the apostle is to be confided in, it becomes all such to remember, that zealous as they may be in their own way, yet that way being different from God's way, they are neither honouring him nor serving themselves, by all the zeal that they can display. It becomes them to be zealous, not for what they have rashly and unadvisedly apprehended to be religion, but for what religion really is, as delineated in the book of inspiration. And if they would be zealous so

as to profit their souls, and secure their eternal interests, it becomes them to go with all humility to that fountain of spiritual knowledge, and to supply their minds with the pure and salutary doctrine by which it is God's will that men shall become wise unto salvation.

How many of our Roman Catholic brethren are distinguished by a most exemplary zeal ! But alas ! their understandings are blinded as to what alone is worthy of any zeal they can display. The Bible is a sealed book to them. They know not what it contains. They get their spiritual instruction from those who teach falsely, and who maintain their authority by misguiding and perverting the people. And, therefore, the zeal by which they hope to get to heaven, is a zeal for the infallibility of a mortal man—for the domination of a bigotted priesthood—for opinions that contradict the Scriptures—for the destruction of those who hold a different creed from themselves—for will-worship, and unauthorised penances, and the merest trifles and mummeries of superstition. All this you see originates in ignorance. The persons of whom I speak, more in pity than in anger, are endowed with the same moral and intellectual constitution that we possess. But "there is no light in them." They have not had the advantage of reading the word of God for themselves in its native purity. The utmost pains have been taken to impress them

with an erroneous belief. And when they are zealous for the falsehoods and the fooleries, which have been industriously pressed on their attention, and inculcated on their faith, and when we recognise in their zeal an instrument of mischief to their own souls, and to the souls of all on whom they choose to exert it, it well befits us to take warning, and to improve the privilege which we happily enjoy of becoming acquainted with the revelation of God's holy will, and saving grace. We may not be in danger of lapsing into all the gross and revolting errors by which they are deceived. But in proportion as we withhold our attention from the word of God, will be the imperfect or mistaken notions that we entertain on the subject of religion ; and in proportion as our notions of religion are imperfect and mistaken, will be the inefficiency or the injuriousness of that zeal with which we cultivate religion in ourselves, and spread it among others.

As an additional instance of zeal without knowledge, and as suggested by the very reference we have now made to the Roman Catholics, I would adduce the treatment which is given to the *religion* of that sect, considered in itself, and to the *members* of that sect, considered in their civil and political capacity. It appears to me, that there is not, in the minds of many, a sufficient discrimination made between

the two things—that these are confounded together, as if they possessed one and the same character, or were indissolubly linked—and that there is often a zeal against the persons alluded to being admitted to an equality of secular privileges with ourselves, merely because their creed is such as to justify and call forth our warmest zeal for its discredit and extinction.

With those who conscientiously hold, that the tenets of the Roman Catholics are such as to render it dangerous to the well-being and safety of the state, that they should be admitted to the same immunities which are enjoyed by their fellow-citizens, I have no quarrel at all. They act consistently when they contend for exclusion. And what is more, they act patriotically and dutifully ; and did I entertain the same opinion that they do—which most certainly I do not—I would feel myself bound to act in the same manner. But though believing their fears to be chimerical, and therefore differing from them in their treatment of the great practical question at issue, and quite prepared to defend my views on the ground, both of right and expediency, were that the topic at present before us, I do not now enter upon it ; but only advert to the error which, I apprehend, is not a little prevalent, that simply, because Popery is a very bad system, and deserves our earnest and decided opposition, therefore, and for no other reason, we

ought to degrade, and disfranchise, and stigmatise all by whom it is professed. And what I plead for is, that this is not a legitimate inference, nor a sound and enlightened mode of reasoning ; and that the zeal which has recourse to it, and which relies upon it, may be very sincere, but is “ not according to knowledge.”

I freely confess, that Popery is in its nature and tendency, hostile to true religion, to genuine liberty, to mental improvement, to human happiness. I conceive that we can scarcely be too eager in our endeavours to expose its abominations, to break down its influence, to emancipate our brethren from its cruel and debasing bondage. And I am ready to admit, that some of those who struggle for the restoration of its professors to their status in our social and public economy, are too chary and too gentle in reprobating the slavish doctrines and destructive errors, by which it is essentially distinguished from the faith of the Gospel. But still it comes clearly and irresistibly to my mind, that the evils contained in Popery, as a code of human belief, do not constitute, in themselves, and independently of all external circumstances, valid disqualifications for a community of civil and political privileges—that the warmest zeal against the former is far from being incompatible with the warmest zeal in behalf of the latter—that we argue on no slight foundation when we argue,

that one of the most efficient means of letting in upon our Catholic fellow-citizens that guiding light and benignant influence which must go to dissipate their ignorance, their prejudices, and their errors, is to remove the barriers by which our exclusive and proscribing statutes have shut up all access to their understandings and their affections—that though this grievous mistake has proceeded from a sincere and holy indignation at the “mystery of iniquity,” which can hardly be too strongly felt, or too vigorously manifested, yet the indignation has been untutored and undirected by the knowledge which separates essential attributes from adventitious qualities, and which shows a measure to be safe at one time which would have been perilous at another—and that when we come to take an accurate and comprehensive survey of all that is necessary to guide our judgment and our feelings on this momentous point, we will not be less zealously affected against those vital errors which constitute the peculiarities of Popery, but our zeal against these will be sounder, and more salutary, and more effective, by its being combined with a wider toleration and a kindlier deportment, in respect to the rights and advantages of citizenship, towards the men over whom Popery has gained an ascendancy from early education, and unfavourable position, and upon whom that ascendancy has, in all likelihood, been increased and rivetted

by the oppressions, and the insults, and the provocations of an ungenerous policy.

I mean no offence by these remarks to any one who may think differently from me on the subject to which they refer. I am only bold to use for myself that freedom of discourse which I readily grant to others. I merely present to you what occurs to me as an apposite and striking illustration of the proposition I am attempting to enforce, that our zeal for religion should be a zeal according to knowledge, and that from ignorant or prejudiced views, men of the most upright intentions, and of the most enlightened opinions in other points, will frequently fall into mischievous errors, and resist the wisest plans of public and practical usefulness.

At any rate, we cannot too diligently betake ourselves to the Scriptures, and muse on what they contain for our guidance in all things pertaining to the doctrines and the duties of religion. It is owing to a disregard of the Scriptures, and to a consequent unacquaintance with the revelation of God's will, that some are zealous in maintaining and propagating dogmas which have no foundation except in their own heated fancy ; and that others are as zealous in attending to forms and ceremonies, which have no more warrant in Christianity than the most absurd and idolatrous rites of Paganism. And there is no cure for this evil but a more enlarged acquaintance with di-

vine truth, as unfolded in the pages of inspiration. If, then, my friends, you have hitherto neglected this attainment, "be zealous and repent." Repent of having paid so little regard to the instruction contained in the Bible, and be zealous in your endeavours to "redeem the time," and to supply the defect. And let your zeal in this study form a preparation and a security for your zeal in every thing else that involves religion, being directed to a worthy end, and employed in the use of appropriate means, and thus made instrumental in advancing your own real welfare, and that of all to whom you can be useful.

3. There must be prudence in the exercise and manifestation of our religious zeal.

I am aware that many worthy pious people have a great jealousy of the interference of this virtue. They are apt to suspect that it springs from indifference to the good cause, and they will sometimes spurn away from them its most obvious and powerful dictates, to show as it were, that their sincerity is beyond doubt or controversy, and to fortify themselves in the solicitude and earnestness with which they prosecute their Christian work. They are all zeal without prudence, just as another class of persons are all prudence without zeal.

Those to whom I allude are chiefly to be found among young Christians. They are but newly enlightened to see the excellence and the ne-

cessity of the Gospel. Their feelings are overpowered by the sight. Their ordinary modes of judging are laid aside. Their whole attention is engrossed by what they have just been brought to consider as the "one thing needful." And in their struggles against sin, whose deformity stands confessed before them, and in their gratitude for the deliverance which has been wrought out for them, and in their anxiety to hold fast and secure the blessings conferred upon them, and in their compassion for those who still remain in the darkness and the peril from which they have been emancipated, and in the joy which animates their souls when looking up to a reconciled God, and forward to a blessed immortality,—in all this there is a fulness and an impetuosity that bursts the limits within which their convictions and their sentiments were wont to be confined, and makes them wonder that any who see what they have seen, and hear what they have heard, and feel what they have felt, can set any bounds to the expression of their zeal. It is very delightful to perceive this holy enthusiasm, considered as a token that the work of conversion has been effected, and that those whom it actuates have been redeemed to God. But while we can easily account for it, and while it should and will meet with the indulgent consideration of all who are partakers of the grace of the Gospel, yet we anxiously

wait for the period when it will submit to be guided and regulated by the maxims of Christian prudence, and when those who cherish it will recognise in the prudence which they are at present so apt to undervalue, the best safeguard to the character which they have attained, and the most powerful auxiliary to that very zeal with which they are resolved to preserve and cultivate it.

In the exercise of religious zeal, our object is to promote religion in ourselves and others. But as there may be more than one way of going to that object, it will be agreed on all hands that we should choose and adopt the best, that which is least exceptionable in itself, and most fitted in the circumstances of the case to lead to a successful issue. And this is just what we denominate prudence. Prudence does not damp nor discourage our zeal. It only prevents us from giving those expressions to it which, on the one hand, would be attended with no benefit, and, on the other, might involve us in difficulties and embarrassments out of which we could not easily escape, or perhaps aggravate the evils we intended to remove, and create mischief which had previously no existence. It teaches us to bring our zeal into action at those times which may be most seasonable, in those places where it is called for by plain duty or by obvious expediency, and in that manner which promises to produce the greatest quantity of good. And as it teaches this, and teaches

nothing more nor less, it teaches a lesson which every one who is a real friend of religion, and who is truly zealous for promoting it, will learn with all humility and practise with all diligence.

The Scriptures most distinctly and expressly sanction this view. "A good man," we are told by the Psalmist, "will guide all his affairs with discretion ;" and surely if he is to bring discretion to the management of his most ordinary concerns, much more should he make it bear on the operation of that zeal which is manifested for the infinitely sacred, and interesting, and momentous affairs of religion.—It was predicted of Christ, whose zeal was so strong that it is said to have consumed him, that he was to "deal prudently ;" and as if to bear testimony to the excellence and advantage of that quality, it is immediately added, that he should "be exalted and extolled, and be very high." The prediction was verified in the whole course of Christ's life and ministration. And what he exemplified in his own conduct, he inculcated upon his followers. Solomon, the wise king of Israel, had said, with regard to a subject on which great zeal is often requisite, but on which prudence is too often despised, "Reprove not a scorner lest he hate thee :—" and our Saviour, who is greater than Solomon, has said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs ; neither cast your pearls before swine,

lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”—Persecution is an evil which the true Christian has to meet with in some form or other, which his zeal prepares him to encounter and to bear, and which he is sometimes ready to court rather than avoid, because it looks like a proof of his sincerity, and affords an opportunity of demonstrating his steadfastness. But our Saviour never exposed himself to it except when duty made it necessary; and his exhortation to his disciples runs thus: “Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves;” and “when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.”—The wicked and the righteous are mixed together in this world; and it grieves the zealous Christian that there should be such a mixture; and he is inclined, in his ardour for the purity of worship and for the honour of God, that the profane, and the unbelieving, and the unrighteous, should be excluded by one sweeping act of discipline. But our Saviour, though he possessed the power to effect such a revolution in the church, did not deem it wise to employ it: And to those who, in their zeal for what is good, are desirous that it should be so, he says, “Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them: Let both grow together until the harvest.”

And the maxims of our Lord were adopted, and his example was followed, by the apostles whom he appointed to instruct us in our Christian duties. There could not, particularly, be a brighter instance of zeal than what was exhibited by Paul. His zeal led him to make every effort—to expose himself to every hazard—to “be instant in season and out of season”—and to offer even the sacrifice of his life, if the cause of the Gospel required it: and yet prudence guided him all along the arduous and difficult path he had to tread. And he only preached what he uniformly practised, when he said, “Walk in wisdom towards them that are without”—“Abstain from all appearance of evil”—“Let not your good be evil spoken of”—counsels these, which while they give no countenance to the dereliction of one principle, or the violation of one duty, and are coupled with exhortations to the most zealous deportment in cultivating, and defending, and promulgating Christianity, yet give a salutary caution to such as might otherwise permit their zeal to hurry them into foolish and hurtful measures, and thus to render them less excellent in themselves, and less useful to others, than they would become by adopting an opposite conduct. They might not acquire such a brilliant reputation, or succeed to such an extent in particular enterprises of philanthropy; but there would be a steadier progress, and more substantial attainments, and

a greater degree of security, in their way towards Christian perfection and heavenly reward.

Be zealous, then, my friends, but also be prudent. You cannot be too zealous in the cause of true vital religion : but for the same reason you cannot be too prudent in the manner by which you try to promote it. Let the greatest zeal be mingled with the greatest discretion ; and the two virtues, when thus blended together, and mutually co-operating, will, by the divine blessing, enable you to abound in all those works of faith, and labours of love, and fruits of righteousness, which correspond with the rich privileges that you enjoy, and the exalted hopes that you entertain, through the dispensation of the Gospel.

SERMON X.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

REV. iii. 19.

“Be zealous.”

IN discoursing on these words, we first endeavoured to show, that religious zeal is natural, reasonable, and necessary ; and that it never can, properly speaking, be excessive. And then we entered on the consideration of those principles and maxims, under the influence of which this affection must be cherished, in order to its being an acceptable part of Christian character, and answering more purely and effectually the purposes for which it is enjoined. We remarked that our zeal must be real and conscientious—that it must be according to knowledge—and that it must be governed by prudence and discretion.

4. And we now remark, in the *fourth* place, that our zeal for religion must always consist with moral integrity.

We formerly stated and maintained, that it is impossible for us to be too zealous for religion. And you may be apt to think that the particular which we have now announced is incompatible with that position; for it does look as if the zeal which would make us violate our moral integrity were extravagant in its degree. But the position which we advanced had reference to *true* religion. If it be *true* religion which we pursue, there cannot be an excessive measure of zeal for that. And when, in the exercise of our zeal, we do what is contrary to the law of God, then so far as this goes, it is not true religion for which we are really zealous. We may think so, and appearances may coincide with what we think. But we are labouring under a mistake, and a mistake of essential moment. For true religion includes the law of God. We cannot be attached to the one without being attached to the other. And even though we could contemplate true religion, as the object at which we aim, separately from the means by which we are endeavouring to promote it, still that will not do; for every part of our conduct must be regulated by the divine will, and as moral and responsible agents, it is not more necessary that we seek to attain a lawful end, than it is necessary that we seek to attain it by lawful and unexceptionable methods. It never can be allowable for us to do what is morally wrong, whatever be the advantageous

consequences that are to follow it. And least of all, one should suppose, can such a proceeding be allowable, when we are striving to advance the interests of religion ; because religion, from its very nature, must be considered as casting from it all such unhallowed aid, and its whole practical influence goes to discountenance and to condemn every species and every degree of sin. Christianity, as existing in ourselves, cannot be supported or cherished by our doing the very thing which is most inconsistent with its whole purpose and tendency—with all its doctrines and with all its precepts. And as existing in the world around us, its prosperity must be checked and retarded, and its efficacy grievously impaired, when it carries along with it, as one of its auxiliaries, a deliberate or systematic disobedience, in any one point, to the commandment of that Being, who has revealed it because he is holy, and that he might rescue mankind from the bondage of corruption. So that the more truly zealous we are as Christians, the more zealous will we be to keep ourselves free from all moral pollution, and to have “consciences void of offence, both towards God and towards men.”

A striking instance of zeal for what was conceived to be true religion, being gratified at the expense of moral obligation, is to be found in the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees. They said, “Whosoever shall say to his father or his

mother, It is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me ; and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free.” They were very zealous in devoting of their substance to the treasury of the temple, and very zealous in keeping the vows which they had made to that effect. But they went so far as to employ in such dedications, that which was necessary for the support of their parents, and thus to break the fifth commandment, in order that they might enrich or beautify the house of God, and contribute to the honours which were paid him there. And for this our Saviour rebuked them. He found no fault with their gifts, however costly these might be ; but he reprobated the practice of offering such gifts, when it could not be done without renouncing filial affection, and neglecting filial duty. God would not be served and worshipped at such a price. He could not fail to be displeased at that zeal, which attempted to give him glory, by trampling on the law into which he had transcribed the very perfections of his character. And, indeed, had the Scribes and Pharisees understood what true religion is,—had not they been misled and perverted by those to whom they naturally applied for instruction,—had not they looked more to the dictates of human authority than to the oracles of heavenly truth,—they would have seen that the object of their zeal was any thing but true religion, and that it was owing to their mis-

take in this essential particular, that they could ever dream of recommending themselves to God, by a zeal which made them lose sight of that precept in which God had enjoined them to "honour their father and their mother."

This, no doubt, is but a single example ; but it is sufficient for our purpose. It recognises the principle for which we contend, and which we would press upon you, as a principle of great importance. It conveys this lesson, as taught by Christ, that your zeal for religion is not only a very questionable feeling, but that it is really unsound and unavailing, when it prosecutes its work through any breach of the divine law. In that case, it is not correct to call it excessive. It is altogether wrong ; and does not require so much to be restrained as to be regenerated and purified. It is not a zeal for true religion, but for something which has assumed the name merely, and which is, in truth, so different from it, that it tolerates and commits what the Almighty has expressly forbidden. The zeal which our text inculcates, like all the other sentiments and affections which animate the real Christian, puts itself under the guidance of that religion for the advancement of which it strives—submits, on every occasion, to its precepts and government—and so far from trying to honour God by disobeying him, or to save the soul by an act of sin, has it as one of its continual and most strenuous

efforts to avoid sin by resisting every temptation to it, and to please God by doing every thing which he requires.

If, therefore, my friends, you have ever allowed yourselves, in any such expressions of zeal as that to which we are alluding—if you have ever been guilty of disregarding truth, or honesty, or humanity, with a view to promote religion—if, in your eagerness to grow in knowledge of sacred things, and to attend public ordinances, and to abound in benevolent deeds, you have been in the habit of violating any of your social or relative duties—if, in the spirit of a system which professes a devoted earnestness in the cause of God, and at the same time holds that the end sanctifies the means, you have been addicted to such practices as that of endeavouring to make people read the Word of God, by putting into their hands along with it, under the same title and the same aspect, that which you know is only the word of man—if, for the purpose of making the Gospel more palatable to those whom you are anxious to see adopting it, you conceal certain truths, and disguise or misrepresent others—or, if in any other respect, you are chargeable in the behalf of Christianity, with “doing evil that good may come”—then we exhort you to be “zealous, and repent.” Repent of having transgressed God’s law. Let your repentance be the deeper, that your transgression has been committed with

the view of serving your Maker and advancing your own holiness. And let your zeal be henceforth exerted in a manner more accordant with the divine will; and in all its manifestations let it never be permitted to deviate one hair-breadth from the path of rectitude and truth, or to receive assistance from iniquity, be it ever so powerful, and be it ever so well concealed.

5. In the *next* place, our religious zeal must be under the government of charity.

Great things are spoken of charity in the sacred Scriptures. And while to be destitute of it, is to be destitute of what is equally graceful and essential in the Christian character; so to possess it, and to have our hearts and lives pervaded by it, is to have what most assimilates us to God, and best prepares us for heaven.

Charity is of unspeakable consequence in the exercise of zeal. If we were not induced by charity to take an interest in our brethren of mankind, we could be at no great pains and make no great exertion to promote their welfare. Though we saw in Christianity an adaptation to their character and necessities, and an engine mighty for accomplishing their salvation, yet not loving them, we could not be expected to go beyond a speculative belief in its excellence and its usefulness; whereas, if they were the objects of our sympathy and affection, we would feel our-

selves impelled to apply it to their spiritual case, and to use every means for rendering its application efficacious in securing their happiness.

And then our zeal being awakened to care for them, charity comes in to soften that aspect of sternness and severity, which it might otherwise assume, and to mould it into a form more consonant to the nature and circumstances of those for whom it is to labour, as well as to the spirit and precepts of that religion which it is desirous to propagate. If we have been brought to entertain just views of the holiness of God—to feel our infinite obligations to his mercy—to hate sin and to mourn for its prevalence—to regard those who are living under its power as hostile to Him whom we love with all our heart—to recognise in such as reject the Saviour the enemies of all righteousness, the opposers of the divine will, and the great hindrances to man's salvation,—we are apt to feel more than ordinary indignation at them, to think and speak and act concerning them harshly and relentlessly, and to consider our sincerity in the cause of religion as requiring us to cast them out from the pale of our favourable regards. But such an expression of our zeal is altogether unjustifiable and injurious. Religion is worthy of the zeal that we cherish and exhibit, because it brings glory to God by bringing salvation to men. Our zeal, therefore, should put forth its energies in behalf of all to whom the

Gospel is necessary and for whom it is intended. But the more sinful and the more opposed any individuals are, the more requisite it is that our zeal should be employed to bring them to the acknowledgment of the truth and to the obedience of Christ. And, consequently, it is of high importance that we cultivate that charity which leads us to be forbearing—to repress harsh judgment and uncandid suspicions—to hope for change even where appearances are most forbidding and untoward—and to show the kindness that is undeserved instead of the anger that is provoked. This will have the double effect of encouraging us to make efforts which a contrary temper would have prevented, for the benefit of those who are far from God and from righteousness; and of giving these efforts a greater chance of being successful, by gaining the attention which we are desirous to fix on the things of God, and by conciliating the hearts which we are anxious to win to the love and obedience of “the truth as it is in Jesus.”

Thus charity serves to excite our zeal—to animate us to the exercise of it, and to make it bear with greater effect on the mind and conduct of those whom it endeavours to benefit. We do not say, indeed, that we are to be charitable in such a manner, and to such a degree, as that we should look on the righteous and the wicked with an equal eye—that we should give credit for faith

where infidelity is avowed—that we should conclude him to be a lover of holiness who is habitually indulging himself in sin,—that we should praise where blame and reproof are evidently merited,—or that we should give countenance and indulgent treatment to hardened transgressors of God's law. This would, to say the least of it, betray utter imbecility. It would tend to confound the distinctions of right and wrong in our own minds. And it would tend to produce the same confusion in the minds of others, and lead them to practise, without compunction, what we should earnestly wish them to avoid. In certain circumstances there are individuals of whom we cannot help forming an unfavourable opinion ; nor can we help speaking of them in the language of decided disapprobation and censure, and behaving towards them with marked and determinate aversion. And all this may be not only just but expedient and necessary, both for them and for ourselves. Still, however, there is no reason for excluding charity. That virtue may find here ample scope for its exercise, in qualifying those views which have excited our displeasure, in moderating the expression which we give to the feelings that have been awakened, and in stimulating us to correct if possible, the errors that we have detected, and to reform, if possible, the evil habits that we have reprobated. And while charity constrains us, amidst our abhorrence of

the offence, to pity the offender, and to pray for him, and to aim at his conversion, it will also hinder us from going too far in those cases in which imperfect information or defective sagacity disqualifies us for judging with impartiality and correctness—from believing the evil which we have only reason to suspect—from ascribing to bad intention the injuries which have originated in mere mistake—from setting down as a fixed and inveterate habit what is nothing more than an occasional aberration—and from treating as an instance of hardened and desperate wickedness, what is only waiting for the application of Christian compassion and Christian counsel, to be stirred up to godly sorrow, and holy resolutions, and fruitful penitence.

Thus charity provides a wider field for the beneficent operation of our zeal than it could possibly have were charity to be wanting, and thus charity helps to invest our zeal with greater power, and to make it productive of more extensive good. And all this while we are proposing and stating nothing which calls in question the impossibility of our zeal being carried to excess. For, as we formerly remarked, it is zeal for true religion that we are inculcating. And as charity forms an essential ingredient, a leading and predominant quality of true religion, and is a sentiment of practical influence, there can be no zeal at all for true religion which is not regulated and

guided by charity. If we are zealous for Christianity, we are necessarily zealous for charity as one of its principal branches; and we cannot be truly or consistently zealous for the religion of charity, when our zeal refuses to be governed by the maxims and authority of charity.

In illustration of this, we may refer to a particular fact that is recorded in the New Testament. "It came to pass, when the time was come that Jesus should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem: and sent messengers before his face. And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." You see how zealous these two disciples were for their Lord and Master. Believing in him and loving him with all their heart, they naturally desired that he should be universally regarded with the same sentiments; and when the Samaritans not only rejected him as the Messiah, but refused him the common offices of hospitality, they were provoked to anger against those vil-

lagers who were thus insensible to the greatness and the mercy of Christ, and in spite of all his high claims on their reverence and kindness, treated him with such unceremonious neglect—such hard hearted cruelty. And such a strong view did they take of the misconduct which they now witnessed, and so keenly did they feel for the honour and the comfort of their great leader, that they proposed to punish the offending inhabitants by overwhelming them in a miraculous manner, with signal and exemplary destruction. No doubt can be entertained of the sincerity of their zeal. Its ardour is equally unquestionable. And taking into account all the circumstances of that unfriendly opposition which called it forth, and the character of him on whose account it was chiefly felt, there does not seem to have been any injustice in the mode by which it sought to express itself. But you see how this proposal of the disciples was met by our Lord. He did not give way to it for a single moment. He reproved them for making it, and he pointed out the cause of that misdirection of their zeal in which it had its origin. He did not find fault with them for being indignant at the treatment he experienced from the Samaritans, or for cherishing an eager interest in his well-being, and boldly asserting what was due to him from those among whom he laboured. But he blamed them for being actuated by a different spirit from that which, as his disciples, they

ought to have cherished. He reprehended them, not because they were zealous, not because they were zealous over much, but because they forgot, in their zeal for him, that he was a compassionate Saviour as well as a mighty Sovereign,—that in this capacity he was concerned not so much for his own personal conveniency as for the conversion and happiness of the world,—and that long suffering and tender mercy characterized him fully as much as sovereign power and retributive justice. They were zealous for Christ, but not for Christ as he really was, and as he had uniformly represented himself to be, both by words and actions. And losing sight for the moment of that charity or love which equally pervaded the object of his mission, and the spirit with which he prosecuted it, they yielded to a mistaken and unhallowed impulse of feeling, quickened, perhaps, by their ancient prejudices against the Samaritans, and called for summary vengeance where the known temper of their Lord should have dictated patience, and pity, and forgiveness. On this account he administered that strong but seasonable and appropriate rebuke, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”

Now, my friends, I consider true religion as nothing else than the will and character of Christ presented to you in a different form. It is just

what he taught and exemplified. It breathes the same spirit, and prescribes the same conduct, and deals out the same reproofs. And if you are harsh in your judgments—if you are unsparing in your censures—if you are severe and relentless in your proceedings respecting those who are opposing Christianity—if you indulge such a temper towards them as would tempt you, were you emboldened by the hopes of having your invocation fulfilled, to call for fire from heaven to consume them,—then we say to you in the words of the Saviour, that “you know not what manner of spirit you are of.” You are zealous, but not for Christianity, for Christianity proclaims mercy and salvation to the chief of sinners, and it inculcates on those who would support and promote it, the charity which thinketh, and wisheth, and doeth no ill to others, and which has a mantle broad enough to “cover a multitude of sins.” And if you would be distinguished by the zeal which Christianity acknowledges and approves, you will always remember that it was revealed “not to destroy men’s lives but to save them,” and that zeal for its influence and prosperity necessarily implies all possible forbearance and all possible kindness towards even its most determined foes. If they have any thing good in them, love them for its sake, as Christ is said to have loved the young man, who notwithstanding refused to be his disciple because he was very rich. If their

actions are capable of a favourable construction, let that construction be put upon them, lest they should be accounted more guilty than they are. If their character is too distinctly marked with practical ungodliness to admit of any doubt respecting their enmity to God and to his cause, still remember that they are “bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh ;” that though their guilt and pollution be great, “the blood of Christ can cleanse them from all their sins ;” and that though at this moment they are “enemies in their minds by wicked works,” and “far from the kingdom of heaven,” they may soon be reconciled and made heirs of the unfading inheritance. And remembering these things, let the zeal with which you abhor their evil deeds, and reprove them for their folly, and avoid them as your chosen companions, and warn others against the contagion of their errors and their vices, be under the softening and guiding influence of that charity which will yet plead all that can be pleaded in their behalf, which will dictate the secret and the fervent prayer that they may be saved, and which will draw them by its silken cords, by its kindly efforts, by all its melting influences, to the path of holiness and immortality.

And I would especially address this exhortation to such of you as have but lately been brought into the light and purity and blessedness of the Gospel salvation. You are more apt than

experienced Christians not merely to turn your back on your former associates in infidelity and sin, but to have your affections entirely alienated from them, and to pronounce upon them a sentence of condemnation, and to treat them as hopeless outcasts from God's favour, and even to accompany all this with something like the expression of an exulting superiority. O my dear friends, this is not becoming your Christian vocation. Do not forget that but a little while ago you yourselves were just what they are now—that like them you were in “the horrible pit and miry clay” of sin—that you rejected the Saviour as they do, and would not open the door of your hearts though he had long knocked at it, and that desperate would have been your case had fire been permitted to come down from heaven to consume you—that you perhaps were instrumental and assisting in making them deaf to the Redeemer's entreaties—that it was no merit of yours which delivered you from the curse of the law and the bondage of your lusts—that the same sovereign grace through which alone you are what you are, is able to work out the same salvation for those on whom you are looking with superciliousness and dislike as the enemies of God, and that they may yet be introduced into the same spiritual liberty which you have reached, and outstrip you in the career of faith and righteousness, and be taken in mercy to the realms of glory, while you

are still left to struggle with the temptations and the sorrows of this present evil world. Forget not these things, and let the remembrance of them make your hearts tender, and forbearing, and compassionate towards every one, even the worst of them, whom you have left behind “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” Be zealous, be very zealous, I beseech you, for that cause which in their alliance you formerly persecuted or despised. Be careful to have “no more fellowship with their unfruitful works, but rather reprove them ;” and never think that you can be too earnest, and too active, and too persevering in that good path on which you have entered, and along which the Spirit is promised to guide you as the path which leads to heaven. But here also let charity have its perfect work, by constraining you to feel for them an affection more exalted and intense than you ever felt before, and to confer on them a boon richer and more durable by far than ever had entered into your contemplation in your “times of ignorance.” Let them see that though you are changed, you are not changed in your concern for their welfare, except by its taking a higher aim, and proceeding on purer principles, and issuing in a more glorious result. Let nothing be said or done from which they may infer either your indifference, or your resentment, or your hostility. But so speak and so act as to show that you do not cease to recol-

lect the pit out of which you have been digged, and the rock out of which you have been hewn—that you deeply sympathise with them in their sinful and miserable state—that your “heart’s desire for them is that they may be saved”—that you are willing to make every allowance for their ignorance and their disadvantages—and that you would gladly please them in every thing consistent with your duty to your God, and to yourselves, and to them. And in all your intercourse with them, in all that they hear you say, and in all that they see you do, demonstrate that your zeal is not the zeal of suspicion, or of hatred, or of pride, but the zeal of that charity of which an apostle has beautifully said, “that it suffereth long and is kind—that it envieth not—vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly—seeketh not its own—is not easily provoked—thinketh no evil—rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth—that it beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

But let me not be misunderstood. I do not inculcate zeal for charity, as if charity and religion were one and the same thing; and I am the more anxious to guard against being supposed to have that object in view, because it is now too much the fashion in the religious world to care for little else than charity and peace, and even to be willing to sacrifice *truth*, if we can only get charity

practised and peace secured. The charity which is thus so greatly in vogue is a spurious charity, and not the charity of the Gospel. The charity of the Gospel, as described in its own record, though it "suffers long and is kind," though it "thinketh no evil," and "hopeth all things," is at the same time a charity which "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." And this may be considered as its fundamental property—its grand essential characteristic. It is charity "out of a pure heart,"—a heart purified by the Spirit of truth, and in all its movements and in all its affections, regarding purity, whether of doctrine or of practice, as an object of constant and paramount concern. It is charity "out of a good conscience,"—a conscience that troubles at God's word as the word of truth, and that holds truth so sacred as to refuse all countenance to the slightest violation of it, even where compassion and kindness are most urgently needed and most warmly felt. It is charity "of faith unfeigned,"—of faith which has saving and eternal truth for the object upon which its unfaltering reliance rests, and which, from a deep conviction of the inestimable value of that object, shrinks back from whatever can disguise, or corrupt, or impair it, and in all the exercises of the love whereby it worketh, admits not of the smallest inroad upon that consecrated territory which, on the di-

vine warrant, it has appropriated and asserted as its own. Such is the charity of the Gospel, and under the guidance and influence of this, religious zeal assumes its fairest character and attains its best success.

But far different is the charity which is continually pressed upon us by many of its modern and living advocates. Their charity is all sentiment, and all softness, and all indulgence. They give the proverbial phraseology which the Apostle uses respecting it in his address to the Corinthian church, a strict and literal construction, as if we should think no evil, even where nothing but evil presents itself—as if we should believe that every thing is right, where we see that every thing is wrong—as if we should endure all the mischiefs that may be done to ourselves or to religion, without feeling any keen indignation or administering any strong reproof; and accordingly they substitute a mawkish sensibility—an imperturbable mildness—an unlimited and all-forgiving good-will,—they substitute these, under the sacred name of charity, in the room of all other attainments, whether they consist in holding fast our belief, or in holding fast our integrity—in resisting the efforts of infidelity, or in keeping ourselves unblameable in the sight of God. They have no other charity than that which from the fear of saying or of doing what is harsh or disagreeable, scruples not to confound the

most obvious distinctions of truth and error, of right and wrong, and looks on the righteous and the wicked with an indiscriminating eye—which sees not that forgiveness for a personal injury may be freely and safely granted, where neither repentance nor reparation has taken place, while it is not the Christian's prerogative to pardon the wrongs that are done to the cause of God, nor his duty to cease from withstanding those who do them, till they have ceased from their unlawful deeds—which in its cherished and boasted tenderness for the sinner, gives encouragement and currency to the sin which ought to have been resisted, and rebuked, and punished—and which, rather than put on the look of severity, rather than wound the feelings or expose the unworthiness of the offender, allows him to go on undisturbed in his guilty career, and is even contented that he should perish, provided only he can be made to go pleased and smiling into ruin.

Then, again, as to peace, the same unscriptural error is committed. Our zeal for religion is continually damped in its ardour, and interrupted in its operations, by a certain puling and piping about peace. If we “contend earnestly for the faith”—if we attack error with vehemence in the strongholds where it is trying to entrench and establish itself—if we put the asserters of a heretical creed on their defence, or chide and re-

prehend those whose misconduct has justly exposed them to such treatment—if either by word or action we break in upon their harmony, which is only preserved by a surrender of conscience, consistency, and truth,—then the hue and cry is raised against us that we are lovers of strife; and though doctrines are taught which are subversive of the Gospel of Christ, and practices are prevailing which set at nought the authority of God, and principles are avowed so adverse to “pure and undefiled religion” as to call for the most decided opposition and the most relentless hostility, yet we hear nothing but this, “O, it is all very true and very much to be lamented; but let not your zeal kindle up the flames of war among us,—let these things alone,—they will cure themselves,—they cannot do much harm,—leave them to providence and time,—and allow us to have peace.”

Brethren, such a peace as this is the peace of indifference, and delusion, and death. It has no sanction from God, even as “the God of peace.” It is hostile to his glory and his will as the God of truth. And it is inconsistent with that Christian zeal, by which we advance our own spiritual interests, and promote the cause of godliness in the world. The heavenly wisdom by which our zeal is to be guided, is “*first* pure, and then it is peaceable.” True religion not only stimulates us “to follow peace with all men,” but also in the very same precept requires that we shall

follow "*holiness*, without which no man can see the Lord." And for our warning on the one hand, and our encouragement on the other, the Scripture assures us, that "as for them that turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the wicked," to expose them to the shame, and to subject them to the destruction, with which their obliquity of purpose, their disregard to honest dealing, their perversity in choosing paths for themselves instead of those prescribed to them by divine wisdom, so richly deserve to be visited; but that "peace shall be upon Israel," upon those who are "Israelites indeed," who are believing and walking as God's people, and "in whom there is no guile."

Away, then, with those mistaken views of charity and peace, by which some would cool your religious zeal, and frustrate all its operations. Be zealous for the truth. Let all the efforts of your zeal be made in charity. But never forget, that truth is the grand object, for maintaining and promoting which it is to be cherished and put forth, and that charity is to be exercised as a means by which its exertions shall be rendered more vigorous, more enlarged, and more successful. And while you cultivate peace, let it be remembered that you are to be zealous for it only as the result and consequences of that truth without which there can be no peace. Let truth—truth as it pervaded the world when God pro-

nounced all things to be very good, or as restored by the wisdom, and mercy, and power of the Godhead, in the scheme of the glorious Gospel ; let truth be established, let it be placed upon that throne on which it is entitled to sit and reign—let its rightful dominion be acknowledged and submitted to—and then, our zeal having accomplished all for which it struggled, our watchword is peace—“peace by all means”—“peace with all men”—peace in all things—and peace for ever.

SERMON XI.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

REV. iii. 19.

“Be zealous.”

IN considering the principles and maxims by which our religious zeal must be regulated, in order to its being an acceptable part of Christian character, and answering most purely and effectually the purposes for which it is enjoined, we stated that it must be real and conscientious—that it must be according to knowledge—that it must be guided by prudence and discretion—that it must consist with moral integrity—and that it must be under the government of charity.

6. We now remark, in the *last* place, that our zeal must be in proportion to the value and importance of the objects which excite it, and to the exigencies in which these may happen to be placed.

Religion consists of a variety of parts, each of which taken separately has its own meaning and usefulness, and all of which, in their combined

form, constitute the method by which it has pleased God that our salvation shall be promoted and accomplished. It is not presented to us, indeed, under the aspect, and with the usual demonstrations, of a regular system ; but still it is capable of a systematic arrangement, from which no portion of it, however apparently alien from its general scope, and however apparently unessential to its ultimate design, can be wisely or consistently excluded. All its subjects harmonize with one another in their nature, or in their mutual dependency, or in the great objects which they are intended and calculated to attain. Every one of them has its own appointed place, and bears its own influential part, in the economy of God's will respecting the deliverance and happiness of his fallen creatures. And although, with regard to some of them, we may not be able to discern either their relative or their absolute consequence, yet we may be certain, from the perfection of him who has put them where they are, that they *are* of consequence there in some shape or other ; and though we cannot affirm that the knowledge and belief of every one of them is indispensable to the redemption of a sinner, yet we may affirm, that the knowledge and belief from which many of them are excluded, must be so far incomplete, and that wilfully to neglect or to disregard any of them, while aware that they have the sanction of divine authority, is to betray a

spirit not very accordant with the reverent and submissive spirit of a true Christian.

The inference that falls to be deduced from this statement, in reference to our religious zeal, is evidently that our religious zeal must operate in behalf of every department of Christianity—that no branch of it, however small, should be treated by us with indifference—that the least and most inconsiderable fraction of it has a just claim on our attachment, and ought to be steadily adhered to.

Such an opinion will be thought too rigid by many, and they will not hesitate to accuse us of proposing in this way to expend our zeal upon trifles. But when the points we allude to are denominated *trifles*, this is just taking the thing for granted. Were they trifles, they would not be where we find them. The appellation cannot belong to what comes from “the excellent glory.” If there be any thing which, by human carelessness, or by human interference, has intermingled itself with divine revelation, let it not merely be treated with neglect, but let it be discarded altogether as an impious intruder. But let it not be said of one iota of the remainder, that it is of trifling moment. It proceeds from the majesty of God ; it is addressed to the faith, or given for the government of men ; and though it may make but a small figure in the midst of those all-important truths which surround it, and though it

might, so far as we can discover, be dropped from the system without materially affecting either its truth or its efficacy, still such freedom cannot be used with it, and the profound respect due to the character of its author properly and fully manifested.

And were this once allowed to be a legitimate practice, I know not where it might be expected to stop. The unbending maxim of "thus saith the Lord," would be speedily superseded by the more convenient maxim of "thus thinks man." The most fundamental tenets would quickly be deemed and ranked among those accidental circumstances which need not be retained, or which, if retained, deserve not to be heeded. And in this manner the whole communication which we have received from heaven would ere long be permitted to sink into the class of insignificant messages, and what God intended to result in the best interests of his creatures, would be converted into an instrument of dishonouring and disobeying himself.

Both in reason and expediency, therefore, we abide by the principle, that whatever our Creator has put into the scheme and the record of the Gospel, must be the object of our unconquerable regard, and that if any one of its particulars, be it ever so minute, and be it ever so seemingly unconnected with our welfare, have the misfortune to be assailed by unbelievers, and assailed

by them with the view of wresting it from its position, and casting it away as useless or irrelevant, then it becomes us to be zealous in our endeavours to defend it, and by defending it to defend the integrity of revelation, and the honour of him who gave it. To sit calmly by in such a case, and see unmoved the merest outskirts of Christianity invaded, is virtually to acknowledge that we are destitute of religious zeal, and therefore possess not what we are commanded to have.

But notwithstanding all this, it cannot be doubted, that the various parts of religion have different degrees of importance belonging to them. Such is the case with all systems whatever; and Christianity forms no exception. Every system has certain *leading* principles and properties of which it cannot be divested without undergoing a total change of character, and without wholly failing to answer its destined purpose; while there are other *subordinate* principles and properties, which appear, neither in themselves nor in their relations, to be necessary to its existence, and to its ultimate purpose, and which, though it could not lose them without sustaining detriment, might be conceived to be without them, and yet to be substantially and finally efficient. And so is it with Christianity. Being a plan of *divine* contrivance, what is to be found in it, must be considered as important and useful; but

it is evident, that there are some things more important and useful than others,—some things essential, and others only subsidiary—some things the absence of which would deprive it altogether of its efficiency and distinguishing characteristics, and others which it might possibly want, and yet accomplish its great end. And this being the case, it follows, of course, that whether we be cherishing Christianity in ourselves, or pressing it on the attention of others, our zeal must not operate with equal ardour upon every subject, but bear some sort of proportion to the real or the relative importance which they possess—the most important receiving its highest, and the less important its lower measure of warmth and energy. For none of them, indeed, can we feel too much of this sentiment; but as in the expression of it, we must consume time, and strength, and means, and talents, were we to exhaust these on the less important points which religion offers to our regard, we should have nothing left for its more important points,—which would be equally injurious and absurd. Whatever manifestations of zeal we can afford, these we must be careful to husband and to manage in such a manner, as that we may pursue most successfully that which we know to be most indispensable to our own salvation, and to the prosperity of “pure and undefiled religion” in the world. And the nearer we can bring

this adjustment to perfection, so much the more shall we contribute to the advancement of personal godliness, and to the extension and influence of the Gospel among our fellow-men. We doubt not, that it is, in a certain degree, owing to the neglect of this, that private Christians make so little improvement in the divine life amidst all their activity, and that saving truth makes so little progress in the earth, amidst all the efforts that are put forth to spread it. And till we learn to think, to feel, and to act more justly in this respect, we cannot hope to see that extent of good realized in individuals, in the church, and in society at large, which it is the main object of all true religious zeal to further and effectuate.

We may notice a few instances in which these ideas find an appropriate illustration. It cannot be denied, that the doctrine which we hold respecting the particular form of church government is important, because that must have a considerable influence on the character and spiritual condition of those who live under it. But surely it cannot be denied, that the doctrine which we hold respecting the deity and atonement of Jesus Christ our Saviour is unspeakably more important ; because on that depends our hope of being redeemed from guilt and ruin,—because if we have not such a hope, and if such a hope be not scripturally grounded, in vain will be the

most perfect system of ecclesiastical policy—and because, whatever be the nature and constitution of the latter, yet, if the former exist in purity and power, there we behold the partakers of divine grace, and the heirs of future glory. Now, would not that man be justly accounted foolish, and foolish in no ordinary measure, whose thoughts, and whose conversation, and whose energies, were chiefly occupied in determining the kind of rule which should obtain in the church of Christ, and should be comparatively little concerned about the method of acceptance with his offended God, and the divinity of that Saviour in whom he trusted for deliverance? We are far from saying, that church government is a matter of little moment, that it is undeserving of any earnest or anxious attention, or that, in particular circumstances, it may not peremptorily require the most strenuous contendings. The very contrary of this we are disposed and prepared to maintain. But we think it quite indisputable, that the divine nature and atoning merit of him on whom we are to rely for eternity, is a matter of incalculably greater consequence; and, therefore, that it is entitled to a seriousness of thought, to an anxiety of feeling, to a vehemence of exertion, to which the other, by itself, can prefer no competent or satisfactory claim.

We may offer a similar remark as to the eager regard which is paid to nice questions in

the doctrinal, and to minute forms in the ceremonial parts of religion, as contrasted with the little interest which is excited by the doctrines and ceremonies themselves. For some shade of opinion respecting the way in which a doctrine is to be understood, or in which a ceremony is to be observed, we often see a contention carried on with a degree of heat and violence, in which all that is valuable in the one, and all that is useful in the other, seem to be entirely forgotten. And surely it requires no sagacity to perceive, that in this there is something which is not only very offensive to reason, but extremely hurtful in its influence and effects. The warmest zeal is expended in maintaining the points which are of least moment ; so that what may be considered as essential, is in a great measure overlooked and neglected, while that which is but adventitious or theoretical, and which may be the one way or the other, without affecting the essence and the efficacy of the thing itself, occupies the chief attention, excites the highest tone of feeling, and is pursued with the most energetic devotedness. The consequence of our indulging in such an ill-proportioned zeal inevitably is, that our creed is apt to become frivolous, and our devotion shadowy, and our practice unsubstantial ; and while we thus injure our own character by being more zealous for what is little, than for what is great—for what is circumstantial and indifferent, than

for what belongs to the very being and constitution of the subject—for what is obscure and fertile of idle controversy, than for what is clear, and intelligible, and of easy as well as beneficial application, we do material harm to others by thus practically misrepresenting to them the system of Christianity, and teaching them to undervalue its most momentous excellencies, and to waste the strength of their intellect, and the fervour of their affections, on that which profiteth not.

The distinction we refer to is plainly recognised in Scripture. On one occasion our Saviour said, “Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; for ye pay tithes of mint, and anise, and cummin ; and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith : these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.” This is just a reproof which he gives them for being most zealous to do what was least important, and an admonition to them to act the contrary part. He tells them that they should be careful and solicitous, in an especial manner, to cultivate the virtues of justice, compassion, and fidelity. Not that they were to neglect the ceremonial institutions of that economy under which they lived ;—these it was incumbent upon them to attend to, because they were appointed by divine authority, and fitted to serve a useful purpose of their own. But they were to

devote their principal regards to the moral qualities which he mentioned, and to cherish and practise them with peculiar assiduity and earnestness, because they were of more intrinsic value than the observance of mere positive rites, and of far greater utility in forming that character which was required of them as expectants of heaven.

On another occasion, when the enemies of our Lord found fault with him for associating with publicans and sinners, he vindicated himself by referring them to a declaration of the holy Scriptures on the subject ; “ Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” Their traditions taught them that it was wrong for the teachers and students of the law to keep company with profligate and scandalous persons ; and our Saviour does not disapprove of their zeal for avoiding those “ evil communications,” which are apt to “ corrupt good manners.” Although they were not authorised by any special enactment of their law to insist upon such a thing, but were indebted for the maxim to nothing higher than the traditions of the elders, yet he supposed it to be right, and spoke of it as if it had been equally authoritative with those sacrifices which were divinely appointed, and which could not be disregarded without subjecting such as did so to the penalties of sin. He al-

lowed them to judge properly when they decided, that in general the people of God and the instructors of others, should not make companions of wicked men ; and his language implied that their zeal as to this was worthy of commendation. But then he reminded them that there was something of more substantial worth, and more urgent necessity, which they nevertheless underrated ; that though it was important to have no fellowship with the workers of iniquity, it was of much more importance to exercise pity towards them, and to aim at their conversion and salvation ; and that while in his own case, and in the case of all who might be similarly situated, it was both wise and dutiful to be zealous in avoiding their company as much as possible, yet it was their wisdom and their duty to be more zealous still in calling them to repentance, in leading them back to God, and making them wise unto salvation, which could only be done by a temporary violation of that rule, through whose operation they attempted to separate the good from the bad, and to “ keep them unspotted from the world.”

It is mortifying to observe how far professing Christians go wrong, not only in the practical application of the principle now laid down, but also in the speculative estimates which they form with respect to it. We often hear it asserted by certain persons, for example, that it is absurd to give ourselves much, if any, concern about the doc-

trines of religion, and that what they call moral virtue is the only thing which should interest our attention, or affect us with zeal. And they quote as the oracle, or the expounder of their sentiments, the lines of the poet, which say—

For modes of faith, let graceless zealots fight ;
His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.

Any commentary on this couplet of smooth verse and bad theology might well be spared, did it not contain a summary of what many who profess religion both think and act upon. Nothing can be more unscriptural, more irrational, or more inconsistent, than the lesson which it conveys, and the terms in which it conveys it. Does not Scripture require us to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints?” Are not we told that we must believe that we may be saved? And must not we believe something? And must not we know what that something is? And is it indeed to be accounted a matter of indifference whether we believe what God has revealed, or believe what he has not revealed? Is it nothing to us that God has devised a particular method of spiritual and everlasting redemption, and that he has recorded it in an inspired volume, and that he has proposed it to our understanding that we may assent to it, and to our heart that we may embrace it? Is it to be the same thing in our esteem, or will it have the

same effect on our salvation, whether we allow that Christ the Saviour is one with the Father, or that he is a mere man?—that we are to be pardoned for the sake of *his* righteousness, or for the sake of our own?—that we are naturally “dead in trespasses and sins,” or that we are naturally pure and holy?—that the divine Spirit is the author of regeneration, or that we ourselves can accomplish that change?—that on the day of judgment we are to stand on the footing of personal desert, or that we are to plead the meritorious doing and suffering of him who came to save us? Is it usually deemed wise and commendable to strive for the prevalence of literary, and political, and scientific truth—of which the most that can be said is, that it may promote the present interests of our race? And shall *they* be ridiculed as zealots and as graceless zealots, who strive to discern and to maintain religious truth?—who on this point labour to “prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good?”—who employ their faculties in ascertaining what God has said respecting their eternal happiness, and cleave to that with invincible steadfastness, and struggle to get it the ascendancy over all false and unworthy and dangerous notions of the divine will? To say that we should do otherwise, is to do nothing less than to assert the *ridiculous* proposition that one mode of faith is just as good or just as bad as another, and to as-

sert the *impious* proposition, that we are to hear God's message with unconcern, and to be quite contented, be our belief respecting it erroneous or correct—honourable or degrading.

And then what possible security can we have for a man's life being in the *right*, when his faith is in the *wrong*? If a man's life is really in the right—right according to God's will—this is a proof that his faith is substantially sound and saving. But it is no proof of zeal being useless to him on points of doctrine and belief. On the contrary, it shows that he has been attentive to the truths of the Gospel, and has taken a deep interest in them, and has cheerfully and steadily surrendered himself to their influence. A man who is reckless as to what creed he adopts, may have his life right in the common and vague acceptation of that term; he may be what the world, in its loose indulgent phraseology, calls a good honest man, or a good sober man, or a good charitable man. But what Christianity desiderates, and what the Judge will desiderate, is that he should be a man of God—devoted to his will, and “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” And surely the very first principle—the very first act of such a man is, that he “hears what God the Lord speaks” to him on the subject of his salvation, and that he renders such an acquiescence in the message itself, and such a submission to the authority which propounds it, as can have no al-

hiance with the maxim which inculcates or insinuates the lawfulness of indifference. Why, let him be indifferent to the doctrines which the Almighty reveals, and on what good or consistent ground can he be any thing but indifferent to the precepts which the Almighty enjoins? He may be pleased to determine that the precepts are far more important in their influence on individuals and on society, than are the doctrines with which he contrasts them. But though that preference which he gives to the former might be fairly transferred to the latter, on a just estimate being formed of each, and a just comparison instituted between the two, yet, granting that he were right in his estimate of their relative moment, when they are considered in their abstract nature or practical effects, the case is wholly altered if we attach to both the sanction of God. The sanction of God being given to both, we cannot safely or innocently be regardless of either. He has an equal right to dictate to our faith, and to regulate our practice. Our obligation consists as much in believing what he declares, as in doing what he commands. And to suppose that we can be very obedient in the one case while we are very unsubmissive in the other, is to suppose that we act without any uniformity of principle. He that will not receive this truth though God reveals it, may as well neglect that virtue though God enjoins it. Every thing that comes to us

recommended and enforced by his authority is entitled to our reverential and implicit regard. And our contempt for any one of his communications, because we deem it useless or insignificant, prepares the way for our contempt of all of them, whenever they offend our prejudices, or stand in the way of our enjoyments.

And besides, who does not see the close and intimate connection that subsists between faith and conduct? In common life, this is universally observed and acknowledged. Our behaviour in any given case, is regulated by the notions or opinions which we entertain respecting it. It is an original law of our nature that it should be so. And it is no part of that law, nor is it countenanced by fact, that things are differently constituted, or should be differently managed, in religion. No reasonable creature—not even the most graceless zealot for indifference to modes of faith, will venture to say that religious principles are unlike all other principles in their being without any practical bearing on the deportment—that whatever we believe concerning God, and Christ, and the way of salvation, and the rewards and punishments of eternity, it will have no effect on the state and complexion of our moral character—that our obedience to the divine law may be the same, whether we attach much importance to the truths which God has

communicated, or attach no importance to them—whether we hold human nature to be in a state of corruption, or hold it to be free from all such defilement—whether we believe in the necessity of Christ's sacrifice and the Spirit's sanctification, or believe in our own sufficiency to work out our own redemption. The whole is a foolish dogma, and a pernicious delusion—originating in infidelity as to the Gospel, encouraged by a proud rebellion against its obvious but humbling doctrines, and embraced by those who are not graceless enough to proclaim war against moral virtue, but who choose to regulate themselves in the practice of it, rather by the maxims of the world, than by the pure and exalted standard of Christian truth.

To graduate a scale for determining the relative proportions of zeal which should be excited in the different departments of religion, and to do it with sufficient exactitude and minuteness, would be a task of no easy fulfilment. And yet it might not be very difficult to give such an outline as would serve to illustrate the general idea for which we contend. Beginning with what is most important and valuable, we should be zealous above all for the truth of Christianity as a revelation of God's will and mercy, because, unless that point is established and maintained, every thing in the case is but error or specula-

tion. Then we should be zealous for preserving that inspired volume in which it has pleased God to record his message to a sinful world, and for guarding it against all those unhallowed freedoms, by which ignorant or designing men might either tarnish its purity or violate its integrity, and extort from it a meaning which it was never intended to convey. Then we should be zealous for the doctrines of Christianity, as pointing out to us the way of deliverance from guilt and misery, and furnishing us with those principles and with that influence, in the absence of which the law of God would be to us only a dead letter, or a direct discouragement. Then we should be zealous for good works, by which we give evidence of our acceptance of the Gospel, and become meet for the heavenly world to which it points our ambition, and on which it fixes our hope. Then we should be zealous for the ordinances of religion, as affording opportunities of expressing that homage which we have been taught to feel towards our God and Saviour, and means of being instructed in divine truth, and guided in moral duty. And lastly, we should be zealous for the decorum and proprieties of Christian deportment, as tending to adorn our character, and to guard against giving offence, and as recommending our faith to the esteem and affection of such as might be repulsed from it by an opposite demeanour.

The zeal that we feel and manifest for our own personal religion must, in all propriety, be greater than what we feel and manifest for the religious welfare of others. In worldly things, a similar caution is seldom or never requisite,—a regard to self-interest being so much stronger in these, than the sentiments of benevolence and generosity. But in spiritual things, it is too much the fashion for professing Christians to be more anxious and active in promoting the welfare of those at a distance than of those at home,—of their fellow-creatures than of themselves. The more remote any people are, the more concern is often felt for them. Persons at the very door are neglected, and the inhabitants of foreign lands ministered to with the utmost solicitude. And the Bible is never read, and the Gospel little studied, and practical Christianity poorly exemplified, by not a few who are busy and bustling, fervent in their sympathy, and liberal in their donations, for the ignorant and perishing sinners that are around them. This, it must be allowed, is a very unnatural allotment of their zeal. And it both indicates defects, and leads to evil consequences, in the religious system of those who are chargeable with it. Zeal for the spiritual welfare of others can never be sound, vigorous, or lasting, unless it result from true zeal for our own. If we do not care for our own souls, and if we ourselves do not feel the efficacy of divine

truth, on what rational principle can we be anxious that the souls of our neighbours should be saved, and that for this purpose divine truth should be brought to their knowledge, or inculcated upon their belief? There are various motives, indeed, of a secular kind, by whose influence men may be induced to engage in the enterprises of spiritual charity : but what becomes of our religion, if we are governed by secular motives in that great department of it which comprehends our social duties, and our obligations to promote the Redeemer's glory? And while these are unworthy in themselves, they must also be uncertain in their operation ; and as they depend on the fluctuating influence of human opinions, and of outward circumstances, they can never give either consistency or permanency to our zeal for propagating the Gospel. This end is secured only by our having firm convictions of the divinity of that scheme, and real experience of its enlightening, comforting, saving power. Having these, we should not merely be destitute of all regard for our Saviour and for our brethren, but should exhibit a strange anomaly in the workings of the heart, if we did not feel them irresistibly constraining us to convey to others what we had found so efficacious to ourselves, in the vast concerns of our eternity. And, then, the more zealously, and the more successfully, that we attend to the business of personal Christianity,—and the more that we

are conscious of its benign and salutary effects, —the more ardent and persevering, of course, will be our zeal in disseminating it, as the richest boon that heaven has ever bestowed, among the whole family of mankind.

We set out with saying, that our zeal should be proportioned not only to the value and importance of the objects which excite it, but also to the exigencies in which these may happen to be placed. It is quite evident, that the zeal which may be sufficient for maintaining the truth of Christianity in ordinary circumstances, will not be sufficient when Christianity is endangered by the combined assaults of numerous, and powerful, and inveterate foes,—that if we should at all times be zealous for the doctrine of the cross, we should be still more zealous in maintaining it at those times when, from the ridicule and sophistry, the talent and the keenness, of its enemies, it is apt to lose ground either in our own minds, or in the affection and belief of others,—that if we ought to be zealous, on every occasion, in promoting the welfare of our neighbours and our fellow-men, our benevolent zeal must assume a higher tone, and make more vigorous efforts, and offer greater sacrifices, on those occasions on which there is some peculiar suffering to relieve, or some singular calamity to avert, or some extensive and laborious work of charity to be achieved. We must not bring to a case of great

difficulty, and hazard, and toil, the same quantity of eager feeling and strenuous exertion, which were found to be adequate to cases of common occurrence, and of easy management. That would be unnatural, and preposterous, and preventive of the very end which we endeavoured to secure. Our zeal must, in wisdom, and for success, be accommodated to the urgencies and the perils which beset the business with which we have to do; and it therefore becomes necessary that we always study to have a distinct perception and a lively impression of the inherent worth, of the comparative importance, and of the external circumstances, of every thing in religion regarding which we are called to bestir ourselves, in order that our zeal may be instinctively roused, or intentionally wound up, to that pitch of energy which is requisite for overcoming all opposition, and for guarding or for retaining every object which deserves our attachment.

In this view, there are some things which most men would call insignificant, but which, from their connection with other things of the highest moment, demand and justify the warmest zeal. The history of religion in this country suggests a striking example. An attempt was made to force our forefathers to submit to impositions in worship, which, in themselves, were of no great consequence, but which were justly considered, and bravely resisted, as assuming an aspect of

magnitude on account of what was associated with them, or contemplated by them. Those who tried to fix them down upon a Christian people, did not only, by doing so, teach as doctrines of God what were only commandments of men, but endeavour to compel those whom Christ had made free, to surrender their spiritual liberty—to take the inventions of human folly mixed up with the ordinances of divine wisdom,—and to embrace at last a whole system of faith and worship, for which, in their judgment, there was no warrant in the Scripture, and to which, with a good conscience, they could not bring themselves to submit. Their zeal was awakened by all this to a tone of fervour and enthusiasm which may astonish those who look only to the insulated circumstances which called it forth, but which never can excite any thing but admiration and gratitude in such of us as take a comprehensive retrospect of all that was done, and of all that was intended, by their ruthless oppressors, and as now enjoy the fruits of that contest which they carried on for their own freedom and for ours, with the most undaunted courage, and the most heroic perseverance. If a public enemy seizes on a remote dependency of the kingdom, which has no real value, and which it may even be an advantage for us to lose, we recognise in that petty depredation, an attack on our independence and national existence, and we avenge it by bring-

ing forward all our skill and strength to the indignant combat. And it is on the same principle that we should act when, in a small encroachment on our personal religion, or our public worship, we discover the hostility which aims at our degradation or our destruction, and threatens, if not speedily and boldly and resolutely withstood, to deprive us, not merely of the fragment with which it affects to be contented, but of all that we hold most valuable in the present life, and of all that is most essential to our preparation for the life that is to come.

Having thus discussed the subject of religious zeal as to its necessity, its extent, and the maxims by which it ought to be regulated, let me conclude with one exhortation. Amidst all the exercises of this pervading sentiment, see that you "lean not to your own understanding," but that you "trust in the Lord, and in the power of his might." In the midst of those loftier and more enthusiastic workings, into which it is excited by a strong sense of your obligations, or by the nobleness of your enterprise, or by the high value which you attach to the particular object at which you aim, and especially if you see difficulties giving way before it as if it were resistless, and hear men imputing to it the success which crowns your efforts, you are apt to forget the still inherent weakness of your nature, and the still utter insufficiency of your own exertions, to advance

one step, or to make one attainment, without divine aid. And the consequence of this is, that your character so far loses one of its most essential and becoming graces—the grace of humility; and that the spiritual pride and spiritual independence which are thus engendered in your heart, will provoke the God whom you so undutifully neglect; and that being no longer favoured with his blessing and help, your ardour will decay, and your fortunes will not prosper. Study, then, to maintain upon your minds a settled and abiding impression of your own inadequacy to the accomplishment of any good work, however fervid and energetic your zeal may be in prosecuting it. Remember that this virtue itself, like every other, is the gift of God, communicated, and nourished, and made effectual by his grace; and that all the influences, the pieties, the moralities, the charities, which are employed to give its operations a right direction, and bring them to a good result, must be derived from the same divine source. And under these impressions, let your zeal be always accompanied with the feeling of entire dependence on the help and the wisdom of God, and with earnest prayers for his Holy Spirit to animate, and guide, and bless you, in “working out your own salvation,” and in labouring for the salvation of your fellow-men, and for the glory of your Redeemer.

SERMON XII.

THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION.

EPHES. i. 13.

“The Gospel of your Salvation.”

THE Gospel is combined with a variety of terms, indicating a corresponding variety of character and of excellence. It is called the Gospel of God, to intimate that it comes from Him, and that it reveals his will. It is called the Gospel of Christ, to denote that Christ is the author of the blessings which it discloses, and that he brings the message which it contains. It is called the Gospel of the grace of God, to signify that its whole scheme, and all that it provides for the welfare of sinners, flow from his free and sovereign bounty. It is called the Gospel of peace, thereby declaring its purpose to be that of making reconciliation between God and man, and restoring that harmony which had been broken and destroyed by the introduction of sin. And in the words of my text it is called the Gospel of our salvation, to draw our attention to it as unfolding the

method by which it has pleased our Heavenly Father to save us from our sins.

All these different views of the Gospel suggest many important and salutary reflections. But at present we intend to confine your attention to it as the Gospel of your salvation.

Salvation in its proper sense means deliverance from something that is feared or suffered. As applied to temporal circumstances, it means deliverance from any of the various dangers and calamities to which we may be exposed, as mere sensitive beings and inhabitants of a present world. And as connected with our spiritual and immortal nature, it means deliverance from all those multiplied evils with which we are afflicted, in consequence of our departure from God and from righteousness, both as they affect our condition here and as they are to be endured hereafter. For though salvation is sometimes taken to denote the happiness of heaven, yet still even then it directs our attention to those miseries out of which it is necessary that we be rescued, before heaven can either be attained or enjoyed.

That we may understand, therefore, the full import of this term, salvation, so frequently used and so vaguely apprehended, we must look to the situation in which we stand as sinners. We must look to it in its every aspect and in all its extent. We must judge of it and estimate it, not according to those loose notions which prevail among

worldly and unthinking men, but according to its real merits, according to established fact and right reason, according to the maxims, and principles, and declarations of the Word of God. And we must not turn away from any view of it that may present itself in the course of our contemplation, merely because it shows us to be involved in greater guilt, in greater peril, or in greater wretchedness, than we had previously imagined, or than our self-partiality may be willing to admit. However bad, and alarming, and revolting any feature of our state may be, still if it be a real feature of our state, we must fix our regards upon it, and give it a place in our convictions, and cherish just and distinct impressions of its being a part of that mass of evil which lies heavy on our fate, and from whose overwhelming pressure it is requisite that we be emancipated. It is only by such a thorough survey of the subject, and such an honest determination of the questions, What are we—What is our condition—What is due to us, and what is awaiting us, as the subjects of God's moral government?—it is only in this way that we can see either the necessity or the fitness of any scheme that may be devised for our deliverance, that we can have an adequate sense of the worth and value of the deliverance that is wrought out, that we can make a particular application of the blessings which that deliverance comprises to the particu-

lar necessities under which we labour, and that we can feel, and exercise, and manifest those sentiments of wonder and of gratitude, which an appropriate and complete deliverance is calculated to awaken in the breasts of all who are made partakers of it.

It is most evident, my friends, that such considerations are essential to those who are not yet brought into a state of salvation, or who do not know experimentally what is comprehended under that phrase. For if they have not a correct, or if they have not an impressive idea of the demerit which attaches to them, and of the dangers to which they are consequently exposed, and of the helplessness which is itself a great part of their misery—if they have not a correct and impressive idea of these things—if they are not convinced that such are the deplorable circumstances in which they are involved, and if they are not prevailed upon to look at them with seriousness and with interest, and to make them the subject of a very faithful self-application, how is it possible that they should recognise the importance of any salvation that may be accomplished for them, or that they should listen thankfully and obediently to the message in which it is set before them, or that they should humbly acquiesce in that method by which it is secured, and by which it is to be brought home to them? They must know and

they must feel that they are sinners, before the salvation of the Gospel can have any real meaning with them, or any real effect upon them. The more that they know and the more that they feel of what is implied in being sinners, both as to time and as to eternity, the more likely are they to become sensible of their need, to perceive the preciousness, to accept the offer, and to relish the blessings, of salvation. Hence it is, that in the sacred volume, from which we learn all that is given us to know about salvation, there is a plain, faithful, undisguised description of man's condition as an apostate creature—a description that pervades all its pages, that is addressed to the understanding and the conscience of every individual, and from which we are not permitted to turn away an instant, as if it were not equally momentous and true. Hence it is, that whether we speak to transgressors in reference to their real welfare, or in reference to what the Bible has revealed concerning them, fidelity requires that we should keep back nothing which goes to constitute their unworthiness, or to aggravate their condemnation, or to bring upon them present sorrows, and everlasting destruction. And hence it is, that when they shut their ears against “the terrors of the Lord,”—when they adopt a low standard by which to judge of the turpitude of their conduct, and the extent of their sinfulness—when they give heed to nothing which

intimates the settled connection that subsists between guilt and suffering—or when they take slight and superficial views of the heinousness of the one, and of the dreadfulness of the other,—they act a foolish and a ruinous part, by excluding or by weakening the operation of those motives which alone are competent, by the divine blessing, to make salvation the object of their unfeigned desire and of their determinate pursuit.

The same remarks apply to those who are inquiring after spiritual deliverance. They have got such convictions of the awful nature of that curse under which they lie, and of the degradation and anguish to which they are doomed, as rebels against the majesty of heaven, that they are roused to serious concern about “the things that belong to their peace,” and are asking what they must do to be saved. But if the bitter things which their conscience has written against them be effaced by the suggestions of fancied excellence or fancied safety—if they come to think lightly, or if they cease to think at all, of that which first awakened their torpid souls—if they see nothing in the jeopardy that surrounds them, or in the judgment that is coming upon them, but what they flatter themselves they may bear or escape from without difficulty,—the result must inevitably be, that their anxieties will subside, that their inquiries will stop, that the great salvation

will be again forgotten, and that they will fall back into that indifference and deadness from which they had once desired, and from which they had actually begun, to recover. It is only by continuing to think of the evils of their fallen state, that they can continue to long after redemption from it. It is only by searching more minutely and more solemnly into the manifold plagues which afflict their souls and darken their prospects, that they are urged on to seek for the light and the liberty of whose value they acquire a growing conviction, from their acquiring a growing conviction of their sin and misery. And it is only by being brought to the sad but irresistible conclusion, that the penalty of a broken law has been incurred by them, and must be exacted from them—that the bliss which they shall thus forfeit, and the pains which they shall thus endure, are equally incalculable—that every step they move in their career of disobedience takes them farther from heaven, and brings them nearer to hell—that all the attributes of God, his despised mercy, as well as his insulted justice, and his incensed omnipotence, are arrayed against them—that there is no help and no hope for them in any created source,—and that unless they “flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel,” they must soon perish, and *that* for ever :—it is only by this dread conclusion being forced upon them, in all

its constraining power, and in all its commanding eloquence, that the salvation of the Gospel unfolds to them a thousand charms which they never saw in it before—that its necessity, and its suitableness, and its fulness, are completely and emphatically revealed to their minds—that they turn towards it with a longing, which nothing can satisfy but the free enjoyment of its rich and numerous blessings—and that they never rest till, by casting themselves upon the compassion of God, and the merit of the Redeemer, they are made to partake of all its present privileges, and are invested with a title to all its future glories.

And while this earnest consideration of the evils from which salvation implies the deliverance, is requisite both to those who have yet to be stirred up to anxious thought about the welfare of their souls, and those who, having been awakened from spiritual slumber, are engaged in seeking after the way by which their souls may be saved—it is also useful to such as have experienced the influence of all that we have referred to, and have embraced the salvation which is held out to them in the Gospel, and are “rejoicing in it with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.” The saints in heaven, whose salvation is perfected, and beyond the reach of injury, look back on the sinfulness in which they were once involved, but from which they were mercifully rescued, and employ the recollection of it to in-

flame the gratitude which animates their bosoms, and pours from their lips, as they sing, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." And if the gratitude of the saints in heaven is kept alive and increased by the remembrance of that redemption which they experienced here below, as well as by the communications of that felicity of which they participate above, surely it becomes the saints upon earth to be mindful of the change which their spiritual circumstances have undergone—to compare their present comforts and safety with their past disquietudes and danger—to meditate on the guilt, the pollution, the fears, the distresses, the ruin from which they have been emancipated, no less than upon the rich consolations which they enjoy, and the precious hopes with which they are inspired—so that by the contrast they may be led to set a higher value on the salvation of the Gospel, have a stronger sense of obligation to him who is the author of it, and sing with a warmer heart, and in a higher strain, the song of thanksgiving and praise; "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

This mode of considering the salvation of the Gospel has also the happy effect of making us

more anxious than we might otherwise be, that we may not lose our hold of it, or grow lukewarm in our attachment to it. Did we cease to take a retrospect of the dangers we have escaped, or did we allow our conceptions of them to become faint and feeble, we might be in hazard of too easily yielding to those temptations which would carry us back into the very midst of them, which would renew our sorrows, and make our "last state worse than the first." But if we often ponder on the mighty mischiefs that once robbed us of our peace, and filled us with terror and with shame—if we reflect on the load of debt which we owed to the divine justice, and for which, had it not been cancelled by our surety, we must have been cast into outer darkness—if we think of the miriness of that clay out of which we have been digged, the hardness of that rock out of which we have been hewn, the depth and the darkness of that pit out of which we have been taken—if we consider these things, they are so painful, so revolting to us, that we shrink back from them ; we anxiously avoid every thing which would risk our returning to them ; we feel ourselves more shut up to the salvation, in the experience of which we are freed from all the evil of them : we cleave closer to Him, but for whose interposition and aid we should still have been abiding in them ; and we apply with greater diligence to those means by which, through

his grace, we shall be prevented from being distressed, and overcome, and ruined by them. And thus, by a sad, and a serious, and a fearful remembrance of the miserable circumstances in which we were as sinners, we learn to take a firmer grasp of the hand that saves us from our sins—we rely more unreservedly on the mercy and the power which alone have brought us into a safe place, and which alone can preserve us from falling—we become more secure against backsliding and apostacy—and we proceed more steadily and more resolutely in the path of salvation.

There is still another advantage arising from this way of viewing our salvation—it helps to excite and quicken our spiritual charity. When we merely think of what we positively enjoy, although Christian love should make us wish and strive that others may be participators of it, yet the sentiment in this case is comparatively feeble, and its operation proportionally destitute of vigour. But when we, moreover, think of what we have endured, of the perils we have escaped, of the destruction that had well nigh overwhelmed us, of all that was oppressive to our feeling, and of all that was terrific in our anticipations—and when we attend to the fact, that multitudes of our fellow-creatures are subjected to the same evils, that they are sinful, that they are helpless and hopeless, as we ourselves formerly were,—

all our sympathies are awakened ; every recollection of our own past miseries pleads powerfully and tenderly in their behalf ; we realize vividly in our minds, because we have known it all in our experience, whatever can render them the objects of a melting pity ; we hasten to warn them of their danger, lest they should be lost irrecoverably before we reach them with our counsels : and there is such a warmth and such an energy in our compassion, that we cannot be satisfied, and cannot be comfortable, till we have persuaded them to bid adieu to the sinful objects to which they were attached, and to the destructive course that they were pursuing—till we have brought them to Him who is “mighty and able to save them to the uttermost”—till we have seen them “compassed about with songs of deliverance,” and heard them saying, in the language of glad and grateful acknowledgment, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.”

We cannot at present do more than take a rapid sketch of those particular and specific benefits which are denoted by the term salvation, in reference to the evils from which it delivers.

It implies deliverance from *ignorance*—not from ignorance of human science or of worldly objects, with which however the Gospel that reveals it does not forbid us to make ourselves ac-

quainted, and upon which it throws a sanctifying light—but from ignorance of God, the first and the last, the greatest and the wisest, the holiest and the best of beings; the maker of all things; the centre of all perfection; the fountain of all happiness. And great is the evil contained in ignorance of God. Ignorant of God, we cannot give him acceptable worship, we cannot rightly obey his will, we cannot hold communion with him here, we cannot be prepared for the enjoyment of his presence hereafter. But from this ignorance we are rescued by the salvation of the Gospel, which reveals God to us; which makes us acquainted with his nature, his attributes, his character, his administration; and which especially unfolds to us the scheme of mercy which he has devised and executed for the recovery of our fallen race, and in which he has at once manifested his own glory, and consulted our everlasting good.

The salvation here spoken of implies deliverance from guilt. The law denounces a penalty against those who break it. The penalty is exclusion from heaven, and deprivation of God's favour, and consignment to the place of misery, where "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." But from this penalty, and from every part of it, there is deliverance provided. Christ has expiated guilt. He has "made reconciliation for iniquity." He has purchased

eternal life. And "to those who are in him, there is now no condemnation." Their sins are all forgiven. They are at "peace with God." And there is nothing to prevent him from pouring out upon them all the riches of his mercy, and making them happy for ever.

The salvation we have been considering implies deliverance from the power of sin. We are naturally the slaves of this power. Sin reigns in us, as the descendants of apostate Adam. We cannot throw off its yoke by any virtue or efforts of our own. And so long as it maintains its ascendancy, we are degraded, and polluted, and miserable. But provision is made in the Gospel for our emancipation. Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all our iniquities," that he might rescue us "from the bondage of corruption," that sin might have no more "dominion over us." And all who believe in him, and are saved by him, are made free to serve that God whose service is the sweetest liberty and the highest honour, and who, in place of "the wages of sin which is death," rewards those who submit to him with that "gift of God which is eternal life by Jesus Christ."

The salvation of the Gospel implies deliverance from the ills and calamities of life. It does not imply this literally. For under the dispensation of the Gospel, there is strictly speaking no exemption from bodily disease, from outward mis-

fortune, or from the thousand distresses that humanity is heir to. But Christ has given such views of the providence of God, he has brought life and immortality so clearly to light, and has so modified and subdued the operations of sin, which is the immediate or the ultimate cause of all our sufferings, that these are no longer real evils to them that believe. When we are brought into a filial relation to God, the afflictions that he sends, form a part of that discipline which he employs to improve our graces, and to prepare us for his presence. He supports us under them; he overrules and sanctifies them for our spiritual advantage; he thus divests them of all that is frightful and intolerable, and, through the salvation of the Gospel, converts them into blessings, by which he teaches us wisdom, and in which he enables us to rejoice.

The salvation here mentioned implies deliverance from the power and the fear of death. Death is one of the most formidable evils we have to encounter. It is, indeed, an awful thing to die. Nature recoils from the agonies of dissolution, and from the corruption of the grave. But he who has accomplished our salvation has "vanquished death, and him that had the power of it." He has plucked out its sting. He has secured our final triumph over it. Death is the *last* enemy that shall be destroyed. But he *shall* be destroyed. His dominion shall be wrested from him, and his

victims emancipated from his grasp. Our bodies must return to their kindred earth ; but they shall be raised, spiritual, incorruptible, and glorious. They shall be re-united to their never-dying and sainted partners ; and shall enter into the regions of immortality. And, thus saved from the tyranny of death by the work of Christ, and having our resurrection pledged and sealed to us by the virtue of his own, we are also saved from those apprehensions with which the natural and unbelieving man looks forward to his departure from the living world. Resting by faith on that mighty Redeemer who has trodden the dark vale before us, and spoiled it of its terrors, and sending our hope “ within the veil, whither He our forerunner is for us entered,” we can dismiss all our alarms, and say in triumphant language, “ O death ! where is thy sting ? O grave ! where is thy victory ? Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And then, while the salvation revealed in the Gospel implies our deliverance from all these evils, it also implies our admission into the heavenly state. It is in order to bring us there at last, that all the other benefits we have been speaking of were conferred upon us. We were delivered from ignorance, that we might know what heaven is—that we might be made acquainted with the way that leads to it—that we might be aware of the preparation necessary for

dwelling in it. We were delivered from the sentence of condemnation, that our forfeiture of heaven might be annulled, and that God might justly and consistently introduce us into its recompense and its glory. We were delivered from the power of sin, that by the removal of moral depravity, and the renewal of God's image on the soul, and the cultivation of holy habits, we might be qualified for the exercises and the joys of heaven, which are all most pure and immaculate. We were delivered from the ills and calamities of life as to all their evil influence, that they might be made instrumental in purifying our character, that they might be prevented from discouraging us in our progress towards heaven, and that they might enhance our blessedness there, by the greatness of our transition from trouble and sorrow to rest and joy. And we were delivered from the power and the fear of death, that soul and body, united as constituent parts of the same redeemed child of God, might become, in heaven, joint partakers of that felicity for which they had acquired a joint title, and for which they had made a joint preparation, upon earth; and that regarding death as a messenger of peace rather than as the king of terrors, the prospect of his coming to summon us away might comfort us in the midst of those distresses, while it stimulated us to the discharge of those

duties, by which our meetness for glory would be hastened and matured.

Nor does our view of the subject stop even here. Our admission into heaven is the consummation of that deliverance which is experienced by the people of God : and, as it is on this account that salvation is sometimes used in Scripture for the heavenly happiness, so it is edifying and consolatory to contemplate the heavenly happiness as equivalent to that salvation in its most perfect state. We are delivered from ignorance ; and in heaven no cloud shall obscure our view—no veil of prejudices shall cover our hearts—no barrier shall cross our path, as we travel on to “ acquaint ourselves with God ”—“ we shall know, even as we are known.” We are delivered from guilt ; and in heaven, at its very threshold, our acquittal and justification shall be proclaimed before an assembled world, and God’s reconciled countenance shall shine upon us for ever. We are delivered from the power of sin ; and in heaven there shall be found no tempter and no temptation—nothing that defileth and nothing that is defiled—affections wholly sanctified—obedience unqualified as that of the angels—purity like the purity of the Godhead. We are delivered from the ills and calamities of life ; and in heaven all tears shall be wiped from the eye, and all sorrow banished from the heart ; “ the inhabitant shall

never say, I am sick"—and not "a mourner shall be seen upon the streets;"—there shall be undecaying health—and there shall be unbroken rest—and there shall be songs of unmingled gladness,—and there shall be "everlasting joy upon the heads" of all that abide there. We are delivered from the power and the fear of death; and in heaven "there shall be no more death," for it "is swallowed up in victory;" the saints that dwell in that sinless and unsuffering land, entered it as the redeemed of him who "was dead and is alive again, and liveth for evermore," and who said to them, "Because I live, ye shall live also:" And as the Lord liveth, having "life in himself," and being the fountain of life to all his people, they shall not and they cannot die. "All things are theirs:" theirs is the unfading crown; theirs is the incorruptible inheritance; theirs is the kingdom that cannot be moved; theirs are the blessedness and the glories of eternity!

Such, my friends, being the excellence of that salvation to which your attention has been directed, how precious ought the Gospel to be in your esteem, which brings the glad tidings that it exists—which offers it to poor perishing sinners—which discloses the method by which it is to be attained—which holds out to you its present benefits, and guides you to its future happiness! Let the Gospel then be the object of your grateful and affectionate regard; believe in it as a

message from your merciful God ; submit yourselves cheerfully and unreservedly to its gracious influence and to its high authority. And instead of contemplating it, and speaking of it, and acting towards it, as if it were enough for you that it is the Gospel of salvation, see that you take a more appropriating view of it, and that it becomes “ the Gospel of *your* salvation,”—that to you may belong, as a vested property, or a reversionary inheritance, all the benefits and all the blessedness of which it is composed.

How precious should Christ himself be to your souls ! He is “ the author of eternal salvation.” It was he who, in compliance with the Father’s will, wrought out this salvation for you. He did and he suffered whatever was requisite, for delivering you from all those mighty and manifold evils, by which you were surrounded and oppressed. And but for his condescending love, his compassionate interposition, you must have been for ever lost. O then let your hearts glow with gratitude to him. Place your dependence upon his all-sufficient merit. Devote yourselves to his service. Seek to promote his honour. And let it be your ambition that at last you “ may be with him where he is,” to rejoice in his presence and to “ behold his glory.”

How precious should the ordinances of Christ be to you—ordinances which set him before you, and recommend him to your regard as the author

of your salvation, and by which you are made more intimately acquainted with the benefits of that salvation, more experimentally convinced of its reality and worth, and more fully prepared for partaking of its final triumphs! Let these ordinances, therefore, be the objects of your cordial reverence and affection; be persuaded to observe them with punctuality, and devotion, and zeal; seek in them for those spiritual advantages which they are intended to convey; and let their practical influence be exhibited in the whole course and tenor of your deportment.

How precious in your regard ought the faithful servants of Christ to be, who preach the Gospel to you, and thus minister to your salvation! Let them, on this account, be the objects of your esteem and confidence. Encourage them by your practical attention to their instructions. Co-operate with them in their labours for the spiritual welfare of their people. Remember them continually and fervently in your supplications at a throne of grace. Let them have your heartfelt sympathies when visited with bodily distress, or when bowed down by the infirmities of age. Think with gratitude and affection of all that they have spoken to you of the word of life, of all that they have done to promote your best interests, of all that they have felt for you in the vicissitudes of your lot, of all that they have asked for you in prayer from their Father and your

Father, from their God and your God. And when the time of their departure comes, or when they are separated from you by death, bear your testimony to the fidelity with which they have “watched for your souls,” by an abundant exercise of that faith, and patience, and godliness, and holy living, to which they exhorted and urged you when delivering the message of saving truth, so that they may prove to you “the savour of life unto life,” and that you may meet them as their “hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing, at the coming of the Lord.”

How precious to you should be the people of Christ, as those who are partakers of the salvation which he has wrought out, and who, along with yourselves, are interested by faith in all its present communications and in all its future joys! Let this constrain you to cherish towards them all the sentiments of unfeigned love—to take a lively concern in the welfare and prosperity of their souls—to do what you can for adding to their number, their unity, their comfort, their sanctification—to labour with all your might, that their “calling and election may be made sure,” and that there may be nothing wanting in their personal redemption, which can in any measure contribute to their own safety, or to the honour of Him by whom it has been secured.

How precious to you should be the work of Christ, as intended, by its merit and its efficacy,

to redeem men out of every kindred, and people, and tongue, and to bring the elect of God from the four corners of the earth, and make them sit down and rejoice in his kingdom ! Let it be your business and your delight to co-operate in this work by all the power and instrumentality with which providence has gifted you. Put forth your best energies in order to illuminate, to purify, and to save a “world that lieth in wickedness.” Grudge not the labour—restrain not the prayers—withhold not the bounty, that may be requisite for achieving this high and holy purpose. And in the freeness and the liberality of your aid to those enterprises of Christian philanthropy, which have for their object the redemption of ignorant and perishing souls, give proof that, having experienced the joys of salvation in your own case, you sympathise deeply and affectionately in the case of those who are afar off in the regions of spiritual darkness and degeneracy, and that you equally feel the obligations of gratitude to God, and of benevolence to fallen and benighted man.

Finally, how precious should be the hope of Christ’s coming “the second time, without sin, unto salvation!” O what a hope is this ! It stretches beyond the boundaries of a present world—it “enters into that within the veil”—it is “full of immortality.” Let it animate your souls amidst the trials, and the duties, and the sorrows of life.

Let it stimulate you to the performance of those beneficent deeds, and to the cultivation of those charitable affections, which by promoting the spiritual well-being of your fellow-creatures, will promote your own preparation, and your own fitness, for the abodes of everlasting love. And when you come to die, it will chase away the agony, and gild the prospects, of that solemn hour; and then will it be exchanged for the possession of those objects on which it now so firmly and calmly reposes—for “the rest which remaineth for the people of God”—for the joy that is full and eternal—for all that has been provided by divine love, all that has been purchased by the blood of Christ, all that is comprehended and promised in the “Gospel of your salvation.”

Gladly, my friends, would I close with the mention of these pleasing anticipations. But I must offer a single word to those with regard to whom no such anticipations can be cherished or expressed. There are some in every congregation, and no doubt there are some among you, to whom the salvation we have been speaking of is but a name or an idea. You are indifferent to it, or you have rejected him who brings it, or you are not walking in the way which leads to it. You are contented with the world, or you are living in ungodliness and unbelief, or you are trusting in the uncovenanted mercy of God, or

you are relying on your own doings and deservings for obtaining what, after all, you acknowledge that you must have, or perish. But have you, in good earnest, made up your mind to rest in such refuges of lies as these?—for refuges of lies they are, if there be any reality in the Gospel, or any truth in the Word of God. “How can you escape if you neglect so great salvation” as that is which the Bible unfolds to you, or if you give it a reception different from what its own value merits, or its great author prescribes? Death is coming upon you ;—and are you prepared to die, though that awful event carries you away from all your earthly holds, and wrests from you the power and the opportunities of seeking for the redemption that you need? Judgment succeeds death ;—and are you so cased in innocence or in hardihood, that you can have boldness at God’s tribunal, and deprecate, with the hope of escaping, “the perdition of ungodly men?” Eternity is soon to receive you into its unalterable scene ;—and can you look to the retribution which is there abiding the impenitent, the unbelieving, the unpardoned, and yet hope that all will be well with you? O do not thus deceive yourselves. Remember that a despised salvation is aggravated punishment—that there is nothing so terrible as “the wrath of the Lamb” of God. “Turn ye, then, turn ye, for why will ye die?”

“Arise and call upon your God,” and “give him glory, before he cause darkness, and your feet stumble on the dark mountains.” Obey his voice, ere his compassions are shut up against you, and his “mercy is clean gone for ever. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may never perish, but have everlasting life.”

SERMON XIII.

FORSAKING PUBLIC WORSHIP.

HEBREWS x. 25.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.

IN discoursing on these words, we are to take for granted the duty of attending public worship, as a duty of real obligation—prescribed by the authority of God, rising naturally out of the views and feelings of a pious mind, and fraught with important advantages to those by whom it is rightly performed. And we shall endeavour to expose the folly and the sinfulness of those excuses by which many attempt to justify themselves for neglecting it—a practice which the text denotes to have been not uncommon in the days of the Apostle, and which unhappily prevails in our own times, and among ourselves, to such an extent, as warrants us in noticing and animadverting upon it with some degree of particularity. It is not to be supposed, indeed, that many of those at whose benefit we more imme-

diately aim, will be present to hear what we have to say for their reproof and their instruction,—their absence from the sanctuary being the very evil which we reprehend. But still, though there be but a few, or if there be but one within the reach of our counsels, it may not be useless and unavailing to dwell upon the subject. And then, for you who hear me, it may be expedient that you have your minds duly impressed with the futility of those reasons which induce men to “forsake the assembling of themselves together,” so that you may be prepared to advise and remonstrate with such persons when they come within the sphere of your influence, and that you yourselves may be warned and fortified against the temptations that you will be ever meeting with, to adopt their maxims or to imitate their example.

1. In the *first* place, of those who desert the house of God, there are some who offer the plea of secular business.

They are engaged in worldly concerns too important to be neglected, or too urgent to be delayed; and to these they must attend if they would not throw away opportunities of aggrandisement which they cannot well afford to lose, and which others would be too ready to embrace and to improve. Accordingly, the time which, as professing Christians, they might be expected to spend in church, they employ in looking after the secularities of their calling or their condition.

The farm, the merchandise, the professional avocation, the earthly pursuit whatever it may be, is substituted by them, without reluctance and without ceremony, in place of the duties of public worship. And their absence from these duties may generally be accounted for by their having some temporal affair to manage, which it would be injurious to disregard and inconvenient to defer.

Now to those, whose frequent or whose occasional non-attendance is owing to this cause, I would take the liberty of speaking in the language of remonstrance.

“Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy,” is one of God’s express commandments; and it is implied in the original and necessary import of this commandment, that on the Sabbath-day you shall not engage in ordinary labour. Nor does it make any difference in the case, whether your labour be that of the field, or of the workshop, or of the counting-room, or of literary and scientific pursuits. All worldly occupation is distinctly forbidden; and by applying to it, you plainly refuse obedience to God’s authority, and profane what he has made sacred.

But the offence is doubled when your secular business is carried on, not only on the Lord’s day, but during the season of public worship: for in this case, to the violation of the Sabbath, you add the wilful neglect of that service which you are

required to give to your Maker and Redeemer, in the sanctuary. You not merely devote to earthly employments the time which He enjoins you to devote to holy rest ; but, moreover, as if to show your contempt of his sovereignty, and your recklessness of disobeying him, you seize upon that portion of this consecrated time which should be spent in the exercises of his house of prayer, and make it subservient to purposes from the prosecution of which it is withdrawn by his authoritative appointment.

And while you thus fail in the duty which you owe to God, who at once demands from you the sanctification of the Sabbath, and the assembling of yourselves together, you are also chargeable with despising a privilege which the divine mercy has conferred upon you, and which is fitted to be essentially useful to all who embrace and use it aright. Here is a means instituted—here is an opportunity offered, by which your piety may be invigorated, your spiritual comfort promoted, your religious and moral edification advanced. It is a token of God's distinguishing goodness, and it concerns your highest welfare ; so that when you come not to the house of the Lord, you demonstrate your ingratitude for the one, and your indifference to the other. And when, instead of worshipping in his temple, you “go after your covetousness,” you say, that what, in his wisdom, he meant for an advantage, you consider a re-

straint upon your industry, and that, in spite of all his kindness in having provided for you ordinances which multitudes of your fellow-creatures would gladly observe, were it only in their power, you prefer the gains of this transitory world to the prosperity of your immortal souls.

I am quite aware, that all work is not prohibited, even during the time of Sabbath worship. Every body knows that there are works of necessity and works of mercy which not only may, but ought to be performed during that sacred season, and which, by the divine precept itself, supersede the operation and the force of all positive enactments. But while these are only exceptions from the general statute on this subject, it is quite clear, that the ordinary and regular business of life has nothing to do with them; that the broad rule to which you are subjected is, to hallow the Sabbath, and to attend the sanctuary; that this peremptorily excludes the ordinary pursuits of the world from any interference with divine worship; and that every case of a stated absence from church for the purpose of following such pursuits, is a case of real and continued rebellion against the will of God. And though you may be able to say, that you only *occasionally* absent yourselves on that account, still the plea of necessity must be made out on scriptural grounds before it can be sustained, or held as sufficient to excuse you. If the necessity by which you think that you are

urged is created by your own indolence, or avarice, or caprice ; or if it be forced upon you by the command of superiors who would make you the instruments of their cupidity, at the expense of your incurring God's displeasure ; or if it originates in the wishes or the requisitions of friends who are more concerned for their own gratification than for your well-doing,—then it is to be considered as destitute of all title to regard ; it has not the character which alone can constitute it a valid excuse ; it is a mere temptation to sin, which you are bound and called upon to resist. The circumstances which will render the act in question justifiable, must be such as that when they occur, you can devoutly look up and appeal to heaven that they amount to an unequivocal direction of Providence—that they need not to be aided and helped out by a previous disinclination on your part to religious exercises—that, judging of them by the spirit and maxims of Christianity, they make the conduct to which they lead agreeable to a pious mind, and to a good conscience—that the voice of God, speaking by them as certainly, though not so audibly, as it does by the written law, requires you to yield to their influence, and to do what, in different circumstances, would be obviously unlawful—that, in short, you could, with humble confidence, rest upon their nature and their urgency

on the great day of reckoning, as shutting you up to the necessity of engaging in occupations at which, but for that cause, your feelings would have revolted. It is only in these circumstances, that your argument from necessity is of any weight, or can stand you in any stead. In all other circumstances it is a mere pretext, as unhallowed as is the deed which it is intended to vindicate. Nor is it any better by being coupled with the plea of mercy, if that plea be not founded in fact. For though, in reason and in humanity, by the instructions of our Saviour, and by his blessed example, "mercy is better than sacrifice," yet it is equally true, and true on the same authority, that unless the claim of mercy is real and substantial, the sacrifice cannot, in duty or in justice, be withheld. And your simply alleging or supposing the one, that you may get quit of the other, and satisfy us as to the propriety of the exchange, can have no other effect than that of adding dissimulation to disobedience, and aggravating the offence you have committed against the God of ordinances.

And why is it that any of you engage in secular business, instead of coming to the house of the Lord? Is it that you may acquire a little more of this world's goods? And supposing that by such extra exertion you did accomplish that end, can you, as wise men, and as accountable beings,

put temporal wealth in competition with moral advancement, or attach any intrinsic value to that which is purchased at the expense of an approving conscience, or look forward with any comfort to the period when you must part with all that you have, and answer to God equally for the mode in which you have gained it, and the manner in which you have used it?—Or is it that you may equal or surpass others in worldly prosperity? And is this an ambition worthy of your rational nature, or of your Christian calling? And does all your desire of excelling centre in having a little more of the gold that perisheth, than falls to the lot of the perishing mortals that are around you? And is the superiority for which you strive, so great or so lasting, as that to reach it you would dishonour your Maker, and forsake his worship, and provoke his indignation?—Or is it that you may provide more liberally and handsomely for your children? And are you so void of confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God, that you will not trust your children to his providence, in the way of sacred duty, and of holy submission to his appointments? Can you expect that his blessing will descend to them with that substance which you have heaped together in opposition to his will, and in violation of what you owed to him as your Lord and King? And if those for whose benefit you have thus sacrificed your obligations, shall ever think and feel as Chris-

tians, can you suppose that they will enjoy with satisfaction what has been procured at the monstrous expense of a father's piety, or reflect with gratitude on the unsanctified labours by which he so dearly and fatally earned it for them?—Or, finally, is it that you may have more leisure for personal or social indulgence during the other days of the week? Alas! are you not contented with the arrangements which God has so wisely made for the distribution of your time, and for the government of your occupations as men and as Christians? Do you deem yourself at liberty, from selfish considerations, or from any considerations whatever, to trench on that sacred day, which he has fenced round by his dread authority, and to rob him of that public homage which he demands from all his subjects? Are six days so insufficient for serving mammon, and prosecuting your worldly schemes, that you must have the seventh also denuded of its sanctity, and its divine employments set aside as less important than your convenience? And as those that profess to believe in Christ, and to reverence his Gospel, and to hope for his salvation, how can we account you sincere in that profession, or how can you reasonably anticipate any advantage from it, when, instead of making the duties of the Lord's day subservient to your progress in faith and purity through the remainder of the week, you cast these duties behind your back, that

through the remainder of the week you may be more worldly—more self-indulgent—more free from the restraints of religious principle, and the influence of Sabbath devotion and Sabbath instruction?

But I need not make any more suppositions on the subject. Whatever be the particular motives which induce you to substitute secular business for attendance on the public institutions of God's grace, they are unworthy, and sinful, and ought to have no place at all in your practical system. The conduct which you maintain under their influence is clearly indicative of a want of love to God and of respect for his authority, and must be attended with the most injurious effects on your spiritual welfare. And therefore, I beseech you to consider seriously the course you are pursuing and the consequences that must necessarily result from it, that you may become sensible of the guilt you have contracted, and the danger that hangs over you, and be constrained to renounce that attachment to the world which makes you so forgetful of your Maker, and to give yourselves to the punctual and devout observance of those ordinances which he has instituted for the benefit of your souls.

And let me beg you to consider how far you may have been instrumental in encouraging or compelling others to do, in this respect, what attaches so much demerit to yourselves. If you

have caused or tempted them to engage in worldly business when they should have been in the house of God—if you have acted thus towards those who, either as your offspring or as your dependants, had a right to your best counsel and your most Christian treatment—if to such you have at once given the precept, and set the example, and offered the reward,—then your guilt is highly aggravated—you need to exercise a deeper and more thorough repentance for yourselves—you cannot too soon cease from the cruel and unholy practice which calls for it—and there is no effort too strenuous for you to make, and there is no prayer too fervent for you to offer up, and there is no compensation too costly for you to give, that you may repair the wrong which you have done to those who were entrusted to your care, and reclaim them from those impious habits into which you had seduced, and in which you had encouraged them, for the sake of “filthy lucre.”

2. In the *second* place, there are some who desert the house of the Lord for the sake of *pleasure*.

Their main concern is to gratify their passions and appetites, and as far as possible, according to their phraseology, to enjoy life. They may not plead for unlimited indulgence, or for indulgence in what is inherently immoral. But there are certain pleasures to which they are attached,

to which they are inclined by natural propensity, or allured by the power of fashion, and to which they will on no account deny themselves. These they must have, whatever it may cost them. And, accordingly, rather than forego them, they will forsake the sanctuary of God, and give up, not merely the reality, but in a great measure the very appearance, of having respect to his public worship. Not that they altogether renounce the practice of attending church. They are sometimes here, or perhaps they come often, or it may be they spend a portion of the Lord's day pretty regularly in the temple. But still there is a sacrifice of this sacred duty, and this sacrifice is made at the shrine of pleasure, where they worship, if not more frequently, at least more devoutly, than they do at the throne of the Almighty. And when you miss such persons at the hour of prayer, you may certainly conclude, that pleasure is the cause of their absence, and that they cannot or will not come, for they are either actually engaged in it, or they have just emerged from it, or they are eagerly preparing for it. They are jaded and worn out by the gaieties of the preceding evening, and, buried in sleep, hear not the sound of the church-going bell, or though hearing it, have no strength and no heart to obey its holy invitation. Or they have some excursion to the country where, in solitary selfishness, or in worldly companionship,

they may give themselves to thoughts, and to conversation, and to actings which separate them, as much and as effectually as local distance can do, from “the congregation of the righteous,” and “the multitude that keep holy day;” and it is well, if to show as it were, their decided preference of their own vain and carnal pursuits to the public worship of God, and their contempt of those who make a different choice, they do not make the moment of our repairing to the sanctuary the moment of their flight from its duties and its neighbourhood. Or they have to make ready for some convivial entertainment, and have neither time, nor disposition, nor fitness, for exercises so inconsistent both in point of length, and in point of solemnity, as are those of God’s house, with the bustle and the festivity of the scene into which they are about to enter; and perhaps, they may deem it safer, because more agreeable to some of those with whom they are going to associate, if they shall have it in their power to say, that instead of being at church they had been at home, or enjoying a walk, or visiting an acquaintance. Or, what, I am told, is not uncommon, they are employed in making and receiving idle calls, to retail the senseless or the wicked gossip of the day, to talk over the amusements of the past or of the coming week, and to kill more pleasantly than they can do in the assembly of the saints, that time which is a weariness to their souls, though

God has consecrated it for his own service and for their good.

Now, my friends, we can have no great difficulty in disposing of such a case as this on scriptural principles.

If the *business* of life must be laid aside that you may come to the house of the Lord and worship in his temple, much more must the *pleasures* of life be foregone for the same holy purpose. In the occupations of the former there is at least some utility; individuals, families, society, may be benefited by the diligence which they imply and the profits which they yield. But as to the latter, even when they are not in their own nature sinful, vanity is inscribed on every one of them. They promote not one substantial interest either in those who indulge in them, or in the community of which they are members. They are at the very best airy and evanescent as a morning dream. And, therefore, if a sentence of condemnation justly goes forth against the one practice, with much greater force and with more direct application, must it bear against the other. If the duties of your ordinary and lawful profession must be interrupted, that for a season you may mingle in the duties of the Sabbath and the sanctuary, there can be no hesitation in denouncing the mere recreations and amusements to which you have recourse, as still more unworthy of being engaged in or even re-

membered during the period of sacred rest and spiritual employments. If guilt attaches to him who, though working with the hand of an otherwise commendable and dutiful industry, yet by doing so, when he should be attending divine worship, “serves the creature more than the Creator,” how much more indisputable, and how much more aggravated is the guilt which attaches to those who, by forsaking the house of prayer that they may indulge in the empty delights of sense and of the world, proclaim that they are “lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God !”

But it is unnecessary to institute, or to be guided by any such comparison as this. The simple question is, are you under obligations to come to the house of the Lord and to worship in his holy temple. If you deny that any such obligations are laid upon you by Him who alone has a right to impose them, then to you we have nothing to say on this subject, and for any argument we can use, you may act as you please. Only you should make yourselves quite sure, that to this sweeping conclusion you have been brought by sound reason and candid inquiry. And it may be well for you to consider whether your coming to church so often as you do, is not a virtual acknowledgment that, in some sense, or in some measure, you feel it to be a duty, and whether it be not corrupt inclination or evil habit that prevents you from

regarding the duty as more sacred, and more peremptory, and more indispensable, than you are at present willing to allow. But if you confess the obligation of attendance on public worship to be clear and peremptory—if it be expressly enjoined by a precept of God's law, as that law is contained in his revealed word—if it is any where or any how recommended and inculcated in the inspired volume—if it naturally arises from the operation of Christian faith and Christian piety—if it is an act of homage and obeisance due from us to him who made and to him who redeemed us—if it is connected with our spiritual consolation, and our progress in holy living—if it contributes to show forth the glory of our heavenly Father—and if it is conducive or essential to the advancement of pure and undefiled religion in the church and throughout the world,—if you confess that these attributes belong to it, and that these effects result from it, then you must likewise confess, in all decency and in all consistency, that the strongest temptations which pleasure can hold out to you, are insufficient to justify one moment's wilful abandonment of the services of the sanctuary. Here your path is plain before you; it cannot be mistaken without wilful blindness; and it cannot be deserted without deliberate impiety and guilt.

If, then, your conscience tells you that the love of pleasure has at any time prevailed upon you to

withhold yourselves from the temple of the Lord, or that this is in any measure a thing of habitual occurrence with you, humble yourselves under a sense of the unworthiness with which you are chargeable ; pray to heaven for the forgiveness of it : and let it cleave to you no more. Think of the importance of what you have been neglecting, and of the emptiness of what you have been preferring to it—think of the honour and the comfort and the advantage of seeking God in the ordinances which he has graciously appointed, and of the vanity, and deceitfulness, and ruinous tendency of those gratifications, for the sake of which you have so often treated them with indifference or contempt—think on the one hand of what your reflection would be at the trying hour of death, could you look up to God as the God whom you had been regularly serving in his holy tabernacles, and could you look forward to the temple in heaven as that place of exalted communion and divine enjoyment for which you had been preparing by a punctual and devout attendance in the temple upon earth ; and think, on the other hand, of what your feelings must be, if your recollections on the brink of eternity went back to Sabbaths profaned and ordinances despised, for the sake of indulgences which pleased you for a little hour, and at last left you “without God and without hope.” Think of these things, and let the impression which they are fitted to

make go deep into your conscience, and determine you to retrace all your steps, and to put away from you that evil thing which has so long made you insensible to the duties of religion. Be resolved that you will never again permit the amusements and enjoyments of a gay life to interfere with your temple service, or to appropriate that time, and that attention, and that devotedness, which you owe to the worship of your Maker. Say to these lying vanities, that you renounce them—that you will have nothing more to do with them—that they shall in vain solicit your regards, or attempt to wean you away from the place where God is worshipped. And tell the votaries of fashion and the devotees of worldly joy, that you will not come any more into their secrets, or have your honour united with their assembly—that you are prepared to defy their scorn, as well as resolved to resist their seductions—that you are convinced of the wisdom and the duty of a faithful observance of those means of grace which your divine Master has instituted, and with which you find their attachment and pursuits altogether incompatible,—and that whatever self-denial, whatever loss of friendship, whatever sacrifice of outward comfort it may cost, as for you, it is your settled purpose that every returning Sabbath shall find you seated in the house of prayer, and engaged in the public service of the Lord your God.

Nay, but my friends, this is not sufficient. I can suppose you thus far advanced, and greatly short of what you ought to do and to be. I can conceive you making a compromise which brings you regularly to church, and yet leaves you enslaved by the pleasures of the world. I can imagine you coming fresh from these to this holy place, and going back to them from this holy place, and thus endeavouring to “serve God and Mammon.” If this be all the attainment that you make, I must tell you that you are still “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity,” and that being to this extent in pleasure, you are dead to God, and that all your sacrifices here are nothing better than an insult and an abomination to him. “Repent, therefore, and be converted.” “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.” Pray for grace to enlighten your minds and to sanctify your hearts. Cast yourselves at the foot of the cross, that you may experience its purifying as well as its pardoning efficacy, and that in your affections and your doings, the “world may be crucified unto you, and you unto the world.” Study to have such views of God as that you shall love him with supreme attachment, and such views of Christ as that you shall believe in him with delighted confidence, and such views of the services of religion, as that you shall have recourse to them with unfeigned ardour and heartfelt devotion, and such views of

the heavenly state, as that you shall be anxiously solicitous to enter into it, and to acquire a meetness for its exercises and its bliss. Aspire to these things—labour to realize them—thus give yourselves up to the power of the Gospel, and then you shall need no entreaty to prefer the public worship of God to the pleasures of a “world that lieth in wickedness”—no argument to convince you of the propriety of making such a choice—no persuasion to bring you to the house of prayer. Your language will thenceforth be, “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” “As for me I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.”

3. We come now, in the *third* place, to offer a few remarks on the plea of health, which is not unfrequently employed to apologise for absence from the house of God.

Now we cheerfully acquiesce in the maxim of the Bible already referred to, that “mercy is better than sacrifice.” We embrace it as characterized alike by wisdom and compassion. And as our Saviour has sanctioned it both by his language and his conduct, and has even sanctioned it in relation to the treatment of the lower animals, we should be acting most unworthily if we withheld

the application and advantage of it from one human being who is placed in those circumstances to which it legitimately refers. Health, as connected with the preservation of life and the performance of duty, is a most precious blessing. And those who trifle with it, or who unnecessarily expose it to danger, or are not careful enough to keep it entire when it is enjoyed, and to recover it when it happens to be lost, are either not sufficiently sensible of its value, or not sufficiently grateful for it. Even on the narrow ground of personal comfort and personal exertion, it is of too much importance to warrant any kind of indifference to it; but when we have obligations to the fulfilment of which it is essential—when we have families and friends who depend upon us for their well-being—when there are communities whose prosperity, whether in temporal or in spiritual things, is to be affected by any failure in our vigour and activity, then our attention to it is clearly demanded by what we owe, both in justice and charity, to our fellow creatures; and wantonly to throw it away is tantamount to the wilful dereliction of those social and relative offices, for the proper discharge of which that act has in any measure disqualified us. All this we not only admit but maintain, as equally taught by the obvious arrangements of Providence, and by the plain declaration of God's word. We grant that in the divine regard, wherever a competition occurs between the

claims of bodily health and the claims of any of the positive institutions of religion, the preference is due to the former. We acknowledge that some persons of undoubted piety and wisdom are too heedless on this point, and are occasionally seen in church when it would not merely be safer, but more dutiful for them to be at home. And, therefore, in the remarks we have to make, we trust that we shall not be understood as indulging in any severity, or as subtracting one iota from that tenderness with which our heavenly Father himself has spoken on this subject.

But, surely, when this tenderness is abused, and health is not the cause, but the pretext, for absence from public worship, we are called upon to speak in the language of remonstrance and rebuke. And it is to such persons alone that our strictures allude. With them every kind and every degree of indisposition is a sufficient apology for not appearing in the house of God. And if they will examine their own minds, they must be sensible, that the occurrence does not awaken the sentiments of regret which it would certainly do if they felt as they ought on religious subjects, but is rather acquiesced in as something which is welcome to them, or at least as something which they have no anxiety to escape. Nor is it necessary that they should be actually labouring under a fit of sickness in order to their finding an excuse for not coming to the

sanctuary. The very apprehension of it is sufficient—an apprehension too, not founded on direful experience or on obvious danger, but on the mere possibility of being injured, or on considerations so little calculated to excite alarm, that in every other case they themselves would regard them as foolish and chimerical, and that were there as much attachment as there is aversion to the exercises of piety, they would never once allow them to come into contemplation. Accordingly, this solicitude about their health is almost entirely confined to the season at which they are invited to the sacred temple. No such solicitude is felt or expressed, when they are invited to take their share in worldly amusements. There they will attend at all hazards and under all penalties. They prepare for them by guarding against every thing which might impair their strength, or render it unsafe for them to mingle in the gay scene. And when the period comes for entering it, their ailments are too slight to be mentioned, they have no fears of suffering the least inconvenience, or they will soon get the better of any evil consequences that may follow exposure and fatigue, and, at all events, they are determined to encounter every risk and to endure every pain, rather than forego the enjoyments that are before them. But in the prospect of going to church, and of remaining there for an hour and a half, that they may worship their Maker and listen to the preach-

ing of his word, they discover infirmities in their constitution, and perils in their way, which either did not exist, or had all disappeared, when they were going to spend many more of those hours which are most sacred to health, in the theatre, the ball-room, or the convivial meeting. Then they are weary and need repose. Or they are feeble, and cannot encounter the bustle of a crowd. Or they are sick, and must be kept quiet, and be very manageable patients for the day. Or there is a storm gathering which will overtake them before they can get home. Or there is a lion in the street which will devour them. Every thing will be quite well with them—they will be quite ready for business or for pleasure on the Monday—but in the mean time they must be careful of their bodily health, and not do any thing even of a religious kind by which that most valuable of all earthly possessions may be either lost or injured!

Do any of you, my friends, recognise in this description a description of yourselves, or do you trace in it any resemblance to your conduct? Then let me entreat you to consider how unworthily and inconsistently you act. You care for your bodily health; and simply considered, that is not only allowable, but dutiful. But is it right to make that a pretext for neglecting the service of God? Is not this to indulge in a species of hypocrisy—that vice which you are so ready to discover and

to condemn in those who are as regular in attending church, as you are ingenious in contriving excuses for deserting it? Or at least, if we are to suppose that there is no real dissimulation, but that you have wrought yourselves into a belief that it is not safe for you to come to the house of God, though that belief has no good grounds to support it, have not you just reason to conclude that there must be something grievously and fundamentally wrong in your heart, when that which so easily keeps you away from the house of the Lord, has little or no effect in keeping you away from places which have no alliance with the Gospel, and in which that which you are so anxious to preserve is far more endangered? You have a soul to care for as well as a body. The health of the body is important. But far more important is the health of the soul. The body must ere long decay, and die, and moulder into dust. But if the soul has been committed to the great Physician, and healed by him of its spiritual maladies, even the body shall be raised again to life and immortality. If, however, the soul has been neglected and left to "perish for lack of knowledge" and of care, the body shall be raised to "everlasting shame and contempt," and "both soul and body cast into hell fire for ever." This is an express declaration of holy writ. And such being the case, is it not folly in the extreme to be so tremblingly alive to all that

can affect the health of the body, and so little solicitous, or rather so perfectly indifferent, about that which concerns the health of the soul? If you had just and vivid impressions of the relative importance of these things, would not your treatment of them be precisely the reverse of what it is? Would not you be disappointed when any thing occurred to prevent you from employing the means of spiritual improvement; and would not you be jealous of any inclination you might feel to take advantage of it, without first ascertaining whether it might not be safely disregarded? would not you consider that indisposition which was no bar to secular pursuits and pleasures, as still less a bar to the exercises of God's worship? And if any hazard was to be incurred, Would not you decidedly prefer the hazard which was connected with the performance of a sacred duty to that which was connected with mere worldly gain or worldly gratification? Unquestionably this would be the case; and therefore, as it is not the case, we are entitled to conclude that you are not sincere in assigning a regard for bodily health as the true reason for your absenting yourselves from the house of the Lord, and that it is to be accounted for by your being strangers to the spirit of devotion and to the power of the Gospel. Why my friends, if you were labouring under corporeal frailty or distress, and had Christian principle and Christian affection

reigning in your minds, you would be desirous to go to the sanctuary that you might at once receive consolation from its services, and be taught the practical and sanctifying use of your afflictions. And this desire you would be hindered from fulfilling by no imaginary or exaggerated dread of personal injury, and still less by an affected inability, but solely by a rational and reluctant conviction that the fulfilment of it would be to tempt Providence, and to be in the true sense of the expression, "righteous overmuch."

I need not, however, enlarge on this topic. It is too obvious to be denied or doubted, that were you really the people of God, did you really love him, and had his service that place in your esteem to which it is entitled, and which it must have if you would enjoy his favour, you would deem it impiety as well as simulation to pretend want of health as the reason of your absence from his sanctuary, when conscious either that the alleged fact did not exist at all, or that it did not exist in such a degree as to involve you in any hazard, or that in whatever degree it existed, it would have left in you both the willingness and the ability to engage in the serious occupations or in the fashionable entertainments of the world. And surely this should lead you to anxious thought and fearful anticipation. You must give an account of the fidelity and strictness with which you have applied your faculties, bodily as

well as mental, to the work of religion. And without adding another sentence, let me just beseech you to think of what your account must be, and of what it must lead to, if you have absented yourselves from public worship, and have no better excuse than this to offer, that, under the cloak of *bodily* indisposition, you were actuated by *moral* indisposition, or that you were suffering from the effects of having served the world, during the preceding week, in scenes of dissipation or amusement, or that by special and anxious care of yourselves, you were preparing for the sordid toils or the favourite gaieties and entertainments of the week that was before you.

SERMON XIV.

FORSAKING PUBLIC WORSHIP.

HEB. X. 25.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.

IN discoursing on this text, we proposed to consider some of the various reasons by which those who neglect the public worship of God attempt to extenuate their sin, or justify their conduct. We have already considered the pleas of business, of pleasure, and of health, showing, as we went along, how inconsistent they are with the principles of genuine piety, and how devoid of solidity and force, and how injurious to the spiritual interests of every one who yields to their influence.

4. We have now to say something respecting those who in this particular are under the government of what is called *fashion*.

The number to be ranked in this class of absentees from church is unquestionably not so great as it formerly was. At one period, and that not very remote, a punctual attendance in

the house of God was accounted extremely vulgar, and therefore carefully avoided by all who were fearful of being branded with this offensive epithet. They came to worship now and then, in order to save themselves from the imputation of absolute impiety; and they came *only* now and then, for the purpose of escaping the still more frightful imputation of being on a level with the poor and illiterate. Of late, however, the extent of this evil has been greatly diminished. Persons of high life, and cultivated taste, and genteel manners, may venture into the temple twice every Lord's day, and even on other occasions also, when it is less a duty, without much hazard of having their claim to these distinctions called in question. And we rejoice to say, that not a few seem to regard it as their true honour and their best privilege to be found, as often as good opportunity is offered, in that holy place, where the rich and the poor meet together to hear the word, and to join in the worship of Him who is the Maker of them all.

But still, there are some, over whom fashion lords it with a high and unhallowed hand. Their vanity is flattered by being thought to belong to the circle in which it presides. Their attachment to it is secured also by the indulgence which it readily grants to their wayward and vicious propensities. It is their business to become acquainted with the rules which it prescribes to its votaries, and their

constant care is to reduce these rules to practice. And unfortunately though very naturally it happens, that they would lose caste and become the objects of ridicule among those who take the lead in promulgating and enforcing its laws, were they to be constant and devout attenders in the sanctuary. They do not make a point of never going there ; but their going there is an exception to the general fact. The general fact is, that they go there as seldom as possible, and only at those times when there is some peculiar and extraordinary circumstance that would be deemed sufficient to warrant this deviation from their usual habits. Accordingly, when other people are moving along to the house of prayer, they may be observed lounging about some frequented place, as if to intimate that they had a spirit above that of the common herd of church-goers. Or, during the time of divine service, they indulge in all those follies which demonstrate them to one another, and to every one that witnesses their conduct, to be quite beyond the reach, or even the suspicion, of methodism. Or they set out on their journey to some distant scene of amusement or festivity, that there may be no doubt of the dashing style and reckless irreligion of that fraternity to which they belong. Or, if they have nothing of this kind to occupy them, you may perhaps see them accompanying their acquaintance to the very threshold of the church, and there bidding them

adieu, because they recollect that they had engaged to meet a friend at the club-room, or to do something equally important and sacred. By the way, we may just hint to those of you who have at any time been honoured with such an escort, that you were in what a true Christian would consider as bad and dangerous company—that the conversation you must have been tempted to indulge in, could not be very suitable to the exercises in which you were about to be engaged—that if it be your duty to “abstain from the appearance of evil,” as the Scripture declares it to be, you were not performing that duty when you exhibited in the very face of God’s people such a Sabbath-day intimacy with the open despisers of his worship—and that it would be no loss either to your Christian character or your Christian reputation, were you resolutely to decline their society in such instances, and to keep them in their own place.

If there be any present of the description now mentioned, suffer, I beseech you, the word of exhortation. In all probability you are young. Perhaps your lot has been unfavourably cast. You have been thrown from your childhood among those who are understood to give the tone and the example to others in such matters. And the thoughtlessness and inexperience which usually attach to your period of life, may have led you unawares or driven you headlong into the path of

folly which they are pursuing. Or it may be, that an aversion to all seriousness, the waywardness of your passions, and a love of show and singularity, have tempted you to join their ranks, and enter into the unholy peculiarities by which they are distinguished. But whatever may have been the cause, we beseech you to pause and listen for a moment to the voice of reason and religion.

We have no objection to what is called *fashion*, provided it keeps within its own proper department. Let it exercise its power over those things which may be one way or another, and in both cases be as it has made them, with innocence and safety. But whenever it encroaches on the province of religion, whose laws and modes are settled by the Almighty ruler of the universe, it evidently becomes systematic rebellion against him, and being so, ought neither to be tolerated nor obeyed. Neither have we any serious fault to find with fashion changing its will as often as those who take the lead in it are so inclined. Indeed, caprice and mutation seem to be some of its essential attributes ; and though it may thus occasion inconvenience and display absurdity, it may be the means of quickening industry, of exercising ingenuity, and of promoting the prosperity of families and kingdoms. But still the changes which it enacts must not trench on the *divine* will, or go to affect the moral and everlasting in-

terests of mankind, which we are commanded and bound to hold sacred ; for otherwise it is guilty of an active and wanton attempt to dethrone the mighty Governor of the world, to rob him of his great and inalienable prerogative, and to sacrifice to its own silly humours the wise and merciful arrangements he has made for the happiness of his creatures.

I lay this statement before you, and I appeal to yourselves—to your candid judgment—to your sober feelings—if it be not undeniably true. I ask you if it is not a violation of every thing that is right and decent, when the fancies of perhaps the weakest and most worthless—no matter, let them be the greatest and the noblest—of mortals, are substituted for the commandments and ordinances of Him, whose power called them into existence, and whose mercy it is that permits them still to breathe in the land of the living? I ask you if you can conceive any thing more dreadful than that men should say or act on the maxim that it is not fashionable to believe in a divine revelation—that it is not fashionable to submit to certain portions of the moral law—that it is not fashionable to worship the great God of heaven and of earth? I ask you if the plea of fashion can be sustained in the estimation of one intelligent being that is not utterly depraved, if your own mind has ever approved of it in the hour of calm reflection, if you think it

will give you any comfort when struggling with the agonies of dissolving nature, and, above all, if it would be listened to at that dread tribunal, from whose reckoning fashion cannot screen you, and whose awards will be regulated by a law which it had impiously set aside—the law of heaven, and will issue in a retribution which it never once contemplated—the awful and unalterable retribution of eternity? I ask you these things; and I beseech you to lay them to heart, to ponder them with deep attention, to beware of suppressing the emotions of anxiety and concern to which they may give rise, to regard every conviction of sin and every feeling of self-reproach with which they may be attended, as a warning voice from heaven, and in obedience to that voice, to pledge yourselves, as in the presence of him who knows your inmost thoughts, who demands your unreserved homage, and to whom you must ere long answer for your conduct, that you will no longer yield to the tyranny of fashion—that, so far as *you* are concerned, you will not permit it to lay one finger on the ark of God—that in defiance of its authority you will, by God's help, “come regularly into the house of the Lord, and worship toward his holy temple.”

It is true, my friends, if such be your resolution, and if you straightway endeavour to carry it into effect—if you are known to do what you

had not done before—punctually to attend the public ordinances of religion—you will, in all likelihood, be laughed at by the people of fashion with whom you were wont to associate. But consider that you are only suffering at their hand, what you yourselves used to inflict upon others, who yet despised it, and have continued unshaken by all your ribaldry. Consider also, whether the ridicule of such men—be it as bitter and unsparing as it may,—whether the ridicule of any set of men, can in the least degree justify your disobeying God, and slighting his holy institutions. And then, if they sneer at you for serving your Maker in the way of his own appointment, if they have the heart to make you their jest and their scorn, because they see you publicly honouring him in whom you “live and move, and have your being”—does not this demonstrate that they are unfit companions for you, and that you cannot consistently with what you owe both to God and to yourselves, take pleasure in their society, or conform to their maxims and their manners? “Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.”

But the great obstacle to your renunciation of that allegiance to fashion by which you have been hitherto inthrall'd, will be found in the native corruption of your hearts, and in the ascendancy of your acquired habits. These will

arm every look of derision and every word of contumely with a sting which they would not otherwise have possessed, and without which they could have had no power to wound or to alarm you. And to overcome these must be your first and great concern. The consideration of this will soon satisfy you how unable you are of your own strength to do the things which yet you are convinced it is your bounden duty and your essential interest to do, and how necessary it is that you should apply for the requisite help to Him who alone can subdue your inward depravity, and teach you "to do well, who have been accustomed to do evil." Follow up your good purposes and your gracious convictions then by praying to the Father of your spirits for these needful communications, by asking them through the Mediator, in whose name all your supplications must be presented, and by never ceasing to implore them till you be emancipated from that captivity in which the world has been holding you, till fashion appears to you what it really is, and what perhaps you have sometimes suspected it to be, a snare to your virtue, and an enemy to your soul, and till, in the freedom, and the purity, and the happiness of God's service you have found an argument, which no ridicule and no opposition can ever resist, for saying, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine

honour dwelleth. My foot standeth on an even place ; in the congregation will I bless the Lord."

5. There are some who forsake public worship, on the ground that they are already sufficiently instructed.

They possess all the information that they need on the subject of religion, or they can get it in abundance from the Bible and other books at home, and therefore it is useless and idle for them to come to church. At least they find it convenient to allege this respecting the pastor on whose ministrations they are expected to attend, and as in reference to them his stock of ideas and illustrations is exhausted, they will listen to him as seldom as possible ; they will trust to their own resources, or apply to other quarters for any additional knowledge they may wish to acquire ; and they will be found in the temple only when, from particular circumstances, something original in matter or in manner may be anticipated, or as often as may be necessary to show that they still make a Christian profession, and that they acknowledge the general duty of engaging in public worship.

Now if there be any persons of this description present, let me observe to you, in the *first* place, that you are perhaps mistaken as to the extent and accuracy of your acquaintance with divine things. It is not such an easy matter to make those

attainments of which you imagine yourselves to be possessed. And were you strictly examined, it might turn out that you are deficient in those very points with which, in your own conception, you are most conversant, and that you even needed to have clearer ideas of such as are commonly allowed to be of the greatest importance. The essential articles of our faith, indeed, lie within a narrow compass, and require no laborious effort and no gifted intellect to comprehend them, so far as a comprehension of them is practicable and necessary. But still they are not so few nor so simple as to be known, and understood, and remembered, without continued attention. They are besides, so connected in the divine record with a variety of minute particulars which serve to explain and enforce them, that these also must be studied, in order that the main subjects may be brought home to our minds, with that precision and clearness in which it is most desirable that they should be always viewed. And it usually happens, and is no unmeaning fact, that those who are best instructed in the great truths and in the minute details of Christianity are the very persons who, notwithstanding all their acquirements, and even in consequence of them, are not only most diligent in their private researches, but also most punctual in their attendance on the public ministrations of the word.

In the *second* place, mere speculative know-

ledge of religion, however extensive and correct it may be, is by no means all that you need to make you fit for heaven. The truths which it embraces must impress your heart; they must affect your conscience; they must arrest your attention; they must command your belief; they must be familiar to your thoughts; they must influence your temper; and they must regulate your conduct. If these effects are already produced, then I have no occasion to press upon you the expediency and necessity of regularly waiting on God in the preaching of his word. Your experience will be worth a thousand arguments and exhortations. But if these effects are still wanting in you, then let me beseech you to recollect that nothing is better fitted instrumentally to bring about that result, than a frequent and faithful repetition of what God has revealed for your conversion and redemption, and of what it will be the business of every minister of the New Testament to urge, for the purpose of persuading you to undergo the one, that you may finally obtain the other. Even if you were real Christians, loving the doctrines and obeying the precepts of the Gospel, it would be of advantage to you to be often reminded of what you had previously learned, that you might be more and more comforted, and edified, and encouraged in the path of duty. It was on this principle that Paul said to the members of the Philippian

church, "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." And unquestionably, if this was requisite or useful, in the judgment of the inspired Apostle, to those who had been savingly taught beforehand, it ought not to be pleaded as an apology for absence from public worship by you, who are as yet not so instructed in the religion of Jesus Christ, as that it will prove to you "a savour of life unto life." And remember also, that whether it be that you require to be enlightened so as to see the way of salvation, or to be guided so that you may walk steadily and successfully in that way, the divine blessing is indispensable for rendering the appointed means effectual ; that though the preaching of the word is not the only means of accomplishing these objects, yet it is one of them ; and that God cannot be expected to send his blessing for the benefit of such as wilfully neglect an ordinance which he has instituted, which is so strongly recommended by its own intrinsic sacredness and propriety, and of whose efficacy so many powerful and practical demonstrations have been afforded, in every age and in every department of the church.

But *thirdly*, from the tenor of your apology, you seem to forget that the services of the sanctuary are not confined to the preaching of the word. This, indeed, must ever be held a very

important and essential part of these services, and of itself demands your presence as often as opportunity occurs. But still it is only a part ; and other exercises are conjoined with it, which are interesting in themselves, beneficial in their tendency, and sacred in their obligation. You come here not merely to hear what God the Lord will say to you through the dispensation of his word ; but also, and as many people think *chiefly*, to engage in his worship in a social capacity, to unite in addressing to him your adorations, your confessions, your thanksgivings, and your supplications, and thus to do public homage to him by making his house a house of praise and prayer. Now do you insist on having novelty in these things ? And will the want of it vindicate you for turning away from them ? Or because you get nothing in our discourses but what you knew before, is that an adequate reason for your withholding from God the tribute which he commands you to pay to him in his holy tabernacle ? Will the extent of your religious information form any valid excuse for your refusing to mingle in the congregation of the righteous, that with one heart and with one voice you may call upon his name ? Were nothing else to be done, to do this is an honour, a duty, and a privilege, that no pious mind could treat with indifference or contempt. And the more that you know of God, and of Christ, and

of salvation, and of righteousness, the more will you feel disposed to come into the courts of the Lord, and offer up the sacrifices of devotion. For the more that you know of these things, the more will you see your obligations to render such a service, and the more will you be convinced that it is good for you thus to draw near unto God. If your acquaintance with the Gospel is so used by you as to become a prevailing argument for your frequently abandoning public worship, then we do not scruple to say that you would have been as well to have remained destitute of it. It has nourished in you a combination of pride and irreligion—a pride which not only makes you think yourselves wiser than your teachers, but incapable of being edified by any ordinary exposition of the word, and which has engendered the irreligion of separating yourselves from the company of those who with less need perhaps of spiritual instruction, but with more love to it, come into the house of God, and worship towards his holy temple. Supposing that your knowledge comprehended all mysteries, and rendered you superior to every one on whose ministry you could be expected to wait, still amidst these high attainments there is a humility more valuable than them all, which you would do well to cultivate; and there is a principle of unfeigned and ardent piety towards the God of ordinances which enters deeply and es-

entially into the Christian character, and which you should with all earnestness study to imbibe and to cherish. These graces would prove a sovereign antidote to the malignant influence of that excuse for forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, which I am now considering, and against which I am now remonstrating with you. Humility, by preventing you from thinking of yourselves, as adepts in the school of Christ, more highly than you ought to think, would dispose you to attend the ministry of his servants, with the expectation that something might be communicated of which you were previously ignorant, that some passage of Scripture might be explained which heretofore had been dark and unintelligible, that some warning might be sounded, some encouragement given, some consolation imparted, some views of the Gospel held out, which were suitable to the circumstances of your temporal or your spiritual condition. And piety, operating upon your knowledge of Christian doctrine, and at the same time enlightened and animated by it, would bring you into the sanctuary that you might present the oblation of your hearts to a redeeming God, that you might sing praises at the remembrance of his mercy, that you might implore from him the needful blessings of his providence and his grace, and that in the sympathies and the fervour of associated devotion, and in the place where Je-

hovah has promised to meet with the assembly of his saints, you might experience the “blessedness of those whom he chooses, and causes to approach unto him, that they may dwell in his courts, and be satisfied with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple.”

I have just one consideration more to notice under this head. You should not lose sight of the influence of your example. Whatever be the amount of your acquirements—even though it were true that you were too wise to need instruction, and that you were so perfect as to derive no benefit from the services of the sanctuary—though all this were as indisputably the fact as it is indisputably the reverse—still it becomes you to ponder the effect which your desertion of public ordinances may have on those around you. No man liveth to himself: whether he be high or humble, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, his conduct will, in some measure, affect the sentiments and behaviour of others; and the more that any one is governed by the spirit of Christianity, the more anxious will he be that nothing which he says or does, may weaken the faith or impair the virtue of his fellow-men.

Now, granting that you were as intelligent in the things of God as you pretend, or as you conceive yourselves to be, you cannot have the same opinion respecting the multitude among whom you live. You cannot but be satisfied that they

require in general all the tuition that can possibly be given them ; that it is a most important thing for them to have access to the public ordinances of religion ; and that without taking advantage of this privilege, they must grow ignorant, and profane, and wicked. And can you imagine that none of them will be tempted to walk in your footsteps, and to imitate your frequent desertion or irregular observance of the institutions of the Gospel ? Have they discernment enough to perceive that superiority on which you arrogate an exemption for yourselves, or rather have they simplicity enough to believe that any such superiority exists, or that any such exemption can be given ? Will they not claim and exercise the same indulgence which they see you so unceremoniously taking in a case where, if there be obligation at all, the obligation must be common to Christians of every degree ? Will not every symptom of distinguished knowledge which you exhibit, and every consequent feeling of respect for you which they cherish, just secure the more unhesitatingly their abandonment of what they should have been industriously taught to hold most sacred ? Having led the way, and continuing to hold out to them such a pattern, is there any one consideration which you can employ to check them in their career, or to prevent them from reaching that close resemblance to it at which they naturally aim ?

Can you lay any effectual restraint on their passions, so that they shall not yield to every new temptation, and go beyond all that they have ever witnessed in you, and under your authority despise the ordinances of religion as much perhaps as they once valued them? And though the sphere of your influence should be ever so limited and narrow, yet may not all this happen to those whom you are most strongly bound to guide in the ways of godliness—to the friend who has confided in your affection—to the servants who look up to you for counsel and kindness—to the children whom God has given you, that by devoting them to his service here, you may train them for his glory hereafter? And is not this a big and fearful responsibility which you take upon you? And viewing it in all its aspects—considering on the one hand the mischief which in all probability you will inflict, and considering, on the other hand, the good that you have it in your power to accomplish and to diffuse, can we protest too strenuously against your giving the slightest countenance to a neglect of public worship, even though to yourselves such a practice were declared by a voice from heaven to be equally harmless and lawful?

We do not say that in your attendance on public worship you should be actuated by a mere regard to the effect which your example may produce on others. There are various motives, in-

dependent of this, which should determine you to give such attendance, whatever may be its influence on those by whom it is witnessed. But still this is a motive which is entitled on Christian principles to much weight, and of the force of which every good and benevolent mind will be fully conscious. There are many things which should persuade you to wait upon God in the ordinances of his appointment; and among these it is consistent with all that the Gospel teaches, to rank the desire which its true votaries must ever feel to make these ordinances precious in the esteem of their fellow-men,—a result to which your example, if not absolutely essential, must at least be highly conducive. And at all events, if consulting your own humour, or wise in your own conceits, and instead of making any sacrifice for the benefit of others, refusing even to profit them by engaging in the exercises of piety, you are instrumental in prejudicing them against the duties of public worship, and allure them into a forfeiture of that spiritual and eternal advantage, which the faithful performance of these duties would have certainly obtained for them, then your evil example has involved you in guilt, and exposed you to condemnation, which all your boasted knowledge of the will of God can only serve to aggravate and secure.

6. In the *sixth* and *last* place, there are some who plead as an excuse for their absence from

public worship, that church going people are no better than their neighbours, and thus give proof of the uselessness of that practice.

This is a branch of the old argument against Christianity—which has been so often refuted that nothing can account for its being still repeated, but the feeling that something must be urged as an apology for unbelief, and that this is one of the readiest, and most intelligible, and most plausible, that can be offered. Christianity, we are told, is not true, or at least not much to be regarded, because many of those who profess it are not holier than many of those who reject it; as if it were not perfectly obvious that a mere outward profession of attachment to any system, cannot possibly determine the real merits of that system, on any acknowledged principle of common sense or common experience, since men may profess what they do not believe, and since that which men do not believe, or which so far from believing, they most probably hate, cannot possibly exercise any direct influence on their temper and deportment. To decide upon the truth or importance of Christianity by such a test, is just as absurd as to determine that a particular fountain is certainly bad, because a stream which flows near it and which apparently flows from it, is scanty and impure,—whereas, if disregarding localities and appearances, we were to trace the stream to its source, we might find that the foun-

tain, whose character we had concluded to be worthless or deleterious, was not the fountain from which it proceeds, but that on the contrary, it sends forth, though in a different direction, waters that are clear, and plentiful, and salubrious.

In like manner, a mere bodily attendance in the sanctuary, be it ever so unremitting and as seemingly devout as we can suppose, cannot be of any use in showing the real influence and utility of that exercise. Nor do we ever allege such a thing, because we know that attendance on the sanctuary may consist either with a good life or with a wicked life, according to the operation of other circumstances with which it is not necessarily connected, and for which it is not in any measure responsible. It is, in the present question, to be viewed as an instrumental duty : and we all know that an instrument serves its intended purpose, not simply in consequence of being used, but in consequence of being used aright. The duties of public worship must be properly gone through, as well as preceded by due preparation, and followed by a desire and attempt to profit by them, in order that they may be efficient in showing their genuine tendency, and practical usefulness. Now we admit, that many who come punctually to the house of God, do nevertheless lead profane and wicked lives. This is an undeniable and lamentable fact.

But then these persons have not employed the means in a wise and suitable manner. They have acted so as to defeat or counteract the end at which we are supposing them to aim. And were we thoroughly acquainted with the way in which they manage the observance, we could to a certainty predict its failure. They are locally present, but they are morally absent. Though their visible persons are in company with us, their hearts and their imaginations are holding converse with something else. They have not come from right and becoming motives. They do not enter into the substantial meaning of the service. They seek not for the benefits which it promises to confer. They take no care to apply it to the objects which it was designed to accomplish or promote. And with all these gross and mischievous imperfections adhering to the performance of the duties we are speaking of, would you anticipate moral improvement, even if these duties were as binding and important in their own nature, as you hold them to be without obligation to enforce, and without utility to recommend them? And could you with any decency denounce them as destitute of beneficial tendency, because indolent and corrupted men take every method to resist that tendency, and by their wilful neglect, or their unpardonable abuse, of what is requisite for making it effectual, they derive no practical advantage from the exercises of the sanctuary?

As well might you proscribe and put down all seminaries of education, because of those who frequent them, there are not a few who, from idling at home, and trifling in school, and decided inattention, and dislike to study, are making no adequate progress in the cultivation of talent, and in the path of liberal acquirements.

We allow that there are too many who are not sanctified by the exercises of God's house; but then this is owing—not to any defect in these exercises themselves—but to the perversity and mismanagement of those who engage in them. And surely it is not by any means either expedient or indispensable that you should follow their example. Such errors are not essentially connected with worshipping and serving God in his holy temple. They are mere adjuncts to it, originating in that corruption and perversity of mind, which it is your first duty to lay aside, and from whose operation it should be your constant study to guard and to protect every sacred thing in which you engage. When we exhort you to attend the public ordinances of religion, it forms no part of the exhortation that you do so with unclean hands and impure hearts,—that you be indifferent or worldly as to the views and purposes with which you come into the sanctuary,—that you be listless, inattentive, or irreverent while its service is going on,—or that you depart from it without one serious effort to remember the truths which you

heard, or one deliberate intention to walk worthy of the privilege which you have enjoyed. Our exhortation necessarily implies in it the very opposite of all this. When we urge you to come into the tabernacles of the Lord, and there to join in rendering him the homage which he requires, we urge it upon you also as a constituent part of the duty, that you approach God in the multitude of his mercy, and under the impressions of reverential fear, and with all those various feelings and actings which correspond with the devotional nature and practical design of such a service. And were it possible for you to give yourselves to both parts of the duty, and still to find it unproductive of moral good, we should then hold your objection valid, and sustain it as a warrant for your absence from public worship. But we have no apprehension of such a result from such an experiment. Such a result in your case would contradict all that we have been accustomed to believe concerning God's appointment, and all that we have had access to know concerning the matter of fact. The question is not what good has public worship done to this profane swearer, or to that fawning hypocrite, or to the other inveterate worldling—though as applied to these we would not consider it as a weak or hopeless engine; but the question is, what good is it calculated to do, and what good has it actually done, to those who have given it a punctual and con-

scientific attendance? And if it is instituted by divine wisdom, shall we be told, or can we believe, that it will be of no avail to those for whose benefit it is intended—that God has desired them to seek his face, and that they must seek it in vain—that he commands them to listen to the preaching of his word, and that his word must return to him void—that he tells and encourages them to pray for his guidance and direction in duty, and that his blessing shall nevertheless be withheld from them? Or can any one who is acquainted with the nature of man, and with that of public worship, deny that the latter is fitted more or less to produce salutary impressions on the former—that the prayers and the praises which are offered up, tend most directly and most powerfully to elevate the affections above all that is vicious and base, to cherish the sentiments of charity and good will, and to secure a closer walk with God in active life—and that the instructions which are delivered from holy Scripture will go to rouse every careless feeling, to correct evil propensities, to strengthen the faith that worketh by love, to excite to vigilance against temptation, to animate the hope which constrains those in whom it dwells to “purify themselves even as Christ is pure?” And then, is not all this verified in the past history of the church, and in the holy and joyful experience of the Christian world from week to week, and from day to day? Every

real disciple of Jesus will bear his personal testimony to the sanctifying, comforting, improving influence of religious ordinances, and in his character he carries about with him a continued proof of their efficacy to produce godliness and good works. He laments, indeed, that he is not more affected and more benefited by them in this respect. But he imputes his shortcomings to his own languor and inactivity—not to any deficiency in their power, by the divine blessing, to make him all that he ought to be. He knows that they are “able to build him up, and to give him an inheritance among them that are sanctified.” He feels that by “waiting upon the Lord he renews his strength; he “mounts up with wings as the eagle,” he runs in the ways of God’s commandments, and is not weary of them—he walks in the path of duty, and does not faint amidst its most arduous efforts, and its most trying difficulties. He is one of a multitude of witnesses to the great truth that those who receive the seed of the word, as dispensed through the medium of religious ordinances, “into honest and good hearts, bring forth fruit with patience” and unto perfection, “in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some an hundred fold.” Many, indeed, who are evidently not under the power of vital godliness, and therefore cannot derive from public worship all the advantages which it imparts to those who are thoroughly alive to the value of the Gospel, will

yet confess that the services of the sanctuary have been the means of producing and fostering in their minds strong impressions of practical duty, of stimulating them to many a good deed which they might otherwise have never thought of, and of restraining them from many an evil deed which they might otherwise have committed without reluctance and without remorse. Even as to those, who, while they are openly wicked, are yet in the habit of going to the house of God, though their conduct is most inconsistent and most unworthy in this view, still it is impossible to say how far their mingling in the congregation of the righteous, and waiting on the ministry of the word, may not have prevented them from becoming more worldly, more profane, and more profligate than they actually are. And of persons who are not of this description, are there not many, who by the gradual and unperceived influence of the service, or by some appropriate confession or petition offered up in their behalf, or by some pointed address to their heart and conscience, have been able to date, in the house of the Lord, and in the midst of his worship, their arrestment in the career of sin, and the beginning of that course of holy obedience which is now like "the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day?" And when we look to the deportment which is generally maintained by the contemners of religious ordinances—when we con-

template their personal, their relative, and their social conduct, and compare it with the general conduct, public and private, of those by whom these ordinances are duly prized and conscientiously observed, we cannot fail to see in the contrast which is thus exhibited, a striking confirmation of all that has been advanced, and to be satisfied, that such as decline going to the house of the Lord, on the ground that religious worshippers are not better than other men, not only take up a ground which is at variance both with reason and with fact, but deliberately forfeit the most important advantages which men can enjoy, who are earnestly desirous of advancing in the path of righteousness, and place themselves in circumstances where, with more exposure to temptation, there will be less inclination and less ability to resist it, and where, in consequence of their self-inflicted privation of the means of grace, they can never hope, on any scriptural foundation, to reach that "holiness, without which no man shall ever see the Lord."

Most of you, to whom I have been addressing these admonitions, may feel, in the consciousness of a regular attendance on God's worship, that to you they are inapplicable. You cannot doubt, however, that there are some among you whose conduct is different, and who both deserve reproof and require counsel on the subject. And

these, however few, we are called upon to warn and to admonish with all earnestness, if peradventure by this means "God would give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth." "How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" But even to you who cannot be classed with those of whom we have been speaking, what we have said may not be altogether useless. Some parts of it may be found to apply, to an extent of which you are not aware, till you search and try yourselves. And at any rate, if it is not advantageous for your personal correction and improvement, it may at least deepen your sense of the general importance and necessity of coming to the house of God, and furnish you with arguments to convince such of your acquaintance as are in the habit of absenting themselves from it, of the utter futility and unsoundness of the views by which they are actuated, as well as animate you with a more zealous and fervent desire to employ your opportunities, and your influence, and your means of persuasion, in order to induce them to have respect to all the ordinances of the Lord.

And to those who regularly frequent the house of prayer, I would address a few words of exhortation. You come punctually here; but, recol-

lect, if you come from worldly or improper motives—if your motives be not such as the word of God, and the nature of the service, and your own conscience, sanction and approve, your attendance cannot be acceptable to heaven, nor is it likely to be accompanied either with comfort or with benefit to yourselves. See, then, that you abjure the influence of all such considerations as have no alliance with the faith, and piety, and obedience of the Gospel, and that by prayer and meditation you seek to be governed by those, and by those only, which are intrinsically pure and spiritual, and which may render it, so far as they are concerned, a good thing for you to draw near unto God.—You come punctually here; if, however, your minds are not suitably engaged—if your affections are removed from the services of this holy place, or at variance with them—if you have no earnest desire to “worship God in spirit and in truth,” and to profit by the preaching of his word—and if you make no adequate exertions that your souls may be edified, and your character improved, by your attendance in the sanctuary—then you are offering an oblation to your Maker which he will reject, and your waiting upon him in his courts, is not only useless, but must add to your guilt and your condemnation. Be careful, therefore, to come to God’s house, and to mingle in its exercises, in such a manner, as that by his blessing, implored

and received, your knowledge may be increased, your hearts impressed, and your feet guided into the way of righteousness and peace.—You come punctually here ; and if you come in a spiritual frame, and worship as you ought to do, and experience the grace and the advantage that are promised—then be grateful to your heavenly Father who brings you to his holy hill ; and while you are thankful for the privilege, study more and more to improve it to his glory and to your own eternal well-being, and walk in all the commandments, as well as in all the ordinances of the Lord ; recommend these to your brethren, by exhibiting their moral efficacy on the temper and deportment of those who conscientiously observe them ; and be ever striving, under their influence, to abound in those graces of piety, and purity, and charity, by which you shall be qualified for the holier and sublimer services of the sanctuary above, where you shall join the multitude of the redeemed who are “ before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.”

SERMON XV.

SLAVERY NOT SANCTIONED BUT CONDEMNED BY CHRISTIANITY.

JOHN VIII. 36.

If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

OUR Saviour evidently refers here to spiritual freedom, as compared with temporal freedom. And of the infinite value and superiority of the former he is anxious to convey a forcible impression to the minds of the Jews, who foolishly allowed themselves to be entirely occupied with the latter.

That spiritual freedom is infinitely valuable and superior we cannot entertain a doubt, when we recollect that it refers to the soul,—to our deliverance from guilt, and corruption, and death, and hell; and that while it implies the blessings which stand opposed to these, it stretches into the regions, and is commensurate with the duration, of eternity. And, if we are not lost to a sense of all that should be most precious to us here and hereafter, it will be the object of our

highest, our most ardent, our unceasing ambition, to obtain from the Son of God that freedom, in possessing which we shall be free indeed.

But this is no reason for underrating the temporal freedom with which it is contrasted. Many are apt to do so. They even go so far as to allege and to maintain that the religion of Christ does neither recognise the importance of liberty, nor condemn and prohibit slavery. And thus our highest authority in all matters of faith and practice, is quoted by those to whom liberty is a matter of indifference, or whose worldly interest is involved in the continuance of slavery, to countenance their opinions and justify their conduct. I propose to show that Christianity teaches the very reverse of what is thus alleged. And,

I. In the *first* place, the erroneousness of the opinion may be deduced from the very phraseology of my text, and from the frequent use and application of this phraseology throughout the word of God.

Observe that, when the sacred writers,—when our Saviour himself, would pourtray the spiritual blessings which he has secured for sinners, and the spiritual evils from which he has delivered them, the terms employed with that view are *liberty* and *bondage*; and that these terms are employed, not as words of mere vague and general import, but as intended to convey ideas at

once definite and impressive, of the different states which they severally represent. This is plain from the mode in which they are applied, and the circumstances with which they are associated.

Such a meaning indeed, is necessarily implied in their being used at all. When we wish to depict any thing that is superlatively good or that is superlatively bad, we are not usually indifferent as to the figures and analogies, which we bring forward for that purpose. On the contrary, we take care to select, not only such as have some formal resemblance to the things we propose to illustrate, but such as correspond with them in the kind and degree of those qualities by which they are respectively distinguished, and as are therefore fitted to communicate correct notions to the understanding, and to awaken suitable sentiments in the heart. We exhibit and explain the character of what it is our object to make fully known, by adducing something which is similar to it in its peculiar features or in its essential nature, and in which those to whom we address ourselves, being familiarly acquainted with it, may easily recognise all that, on account of which we have advanced it, and called their attention to it. And if that, with respect to which we are desirous to inform or to affect them, is itself of high importance, and if we wish it to be regarded in the full extent of its value or of its worthlessness, we invariably have recourse to whatso-

ever is not merely admitted to be worthless or valuable, according as either property may happen to be the one in question, but admitted to be worthless or valuable in no ordinary measure.

Now there can be no doubt that this rule is observed throughout the Bible as well as in all human writings, there being no reason for neglecting in the former what is universally accounted so rational, and felt to be so natural, in the latter. And indeed many striking and apposite examples, in proof of this, might be quoted, with reference to various topics besides the one which is more immediately before us. For instance, in order to urge upon us the mischiefs involved in *ignorance*, it is compared to thick darkness ; and the comparison would not answer the end for which it is made, unless we knew that such darkness, where pitfalls and precipices abound, is fraught with great discomfort, or pregnant with imminent and mortal hazards. And again, *knowledge*, for the purpose of shewing its advantages and recommending its acquirements, is compared to the light of the sun ; and here also the comparison would not answer the end for which it is made, unless we were sensible that such "light is pleasant to the eyes" which behold it, and necessary to guide us in safety through the difficulties and perils that beset our path, and that would otherwise perplex or overwhelm us.

It is in the same manner, and on the same principle, that personal freedom and personal slavery are resorted to by the inspired penmen, to instruct and to impress our minds correctly and forcibly with what is precious and desirable in the state of salvation, and with what is degrading, repulsive, and ruinous, in the state of sin out of which that salvation emancipates us. To say that the state of sin is a state of slavery would not have the meaning which it is designed to have, unless that slavery from which the idea is borrowed were a state of real debasement, of acknowledged and experienced wretchedness. And to say that the state of salvation is a state of freedom, would be just as far away from the import which was meant to be attached to it, unless the freedom to which it is likened, and by which its nature and effects are unfolded, were distinguished by its intrinsic excellence, and by its necessity to our well-being and happiness.

From this it is clear that Scripture considers slavery as a great and essential evil, and liberty as a great and essential good. And the point is still more distinctly made out, when we recollect that the figure made use of by the sacred writers in this case is not a mere *simile*, which is comparatively tame and inexpressive, but a *metaphor*, which gives all emphasis to the truth that it is employed to convey or to enforce. When

our Lord spake of the false teachers that were to appear as hypocritical and devouring, he did not say that they would be *like* wolves in sheep's clothing, but he spake of them as if they had been these very animals themselves : " Behold, there shall arise false prophets, who shall come among you, in sheep's clothing ; but inwardly they are ravening wolves." And when God is spoken of as the sure and permanent refuge of his people, it is not said that he is *like* a rock, or *like* a high tower, or *like* a strong hold, where they may abide in security ; but, in order that this security may be set forth in its highest degree, he is actually called a rock, and a high tower, and a strong hold, for those who flee to him for protection and safety.

And so is it with the state in which we are by sin, and the state to which we are raised by the Gospel. The former is not spoken of, as if it had merely some sort of resemblance to bondage ; but the resemblance is brought out as close and striking, by its receiving the appellation of bondage ; and the latter is not spoken of as if it merely had some sort of resemblance to freedom, but the nearness and accuracy of the resemblance are signified by its receiving the appellation of freedom :—Thus intimating in strong language, not only that bondage and freedom are conditions of life with whose peculiar circumstances mankind are generally conver-

sant, but also that there is an acute perception and an intense feeling of the characteristic properties of each—of the evils of the one and the blessings of the other—and, moreover, rendering that perception still more acute, and that feeling still more intense, by holding up the objects which the terms bondage and freedom were introduced to illustrate as *infinite* in the several qualities that belonged to them, of worthlessness or of excellence. The argument and the phraseology correspond with each other, and are equally instructive as to the proposition we are endeavouring to sustain. It is this ; “ You ought,” the sacred writers may be supposed to say,—“ you ought to seek after the salvation of the Gospel, for that is *liberty* ; and by what you know of the charms, the advantages, and the comforts of liberty, you may form some estimate of the privilege of being spiritually saved. You ought to escape from the guilt and depravity in which you are involved by your apostacy from God, for to remain in it is to remain in *slavery* ; and from what you know of the vileness, and dangers, and horrors of slavery, you may gather some tolerable idea of what it is to be guilty and depraved. And if these representations fail to convince you of the necessity of the change, for effecting which they are produced, and to persuade you to aspire after that change in its requisite extent,—yet if you will only believe that we regard the change as of vast

and incalculable consequence,—that we hold a state of sin to be inconceivably the worst, and a state of salvation to be inconceivably the best state of being in which man can be placed,—if you will only believe this, then you may judge with what esteem we contemplate liberty, and with what abhorrence we look upon slavery, when we adduce these and all that is implied in them, to elucidate our doctrine, and to enforce our exhortation, as to your spiritual circumstances, and your spiritual conduct.”

I might quote a great many passages from the Bible, exemplifying and corroborating what has now been affirmed—such as those in which we read of the “bondage of corruption,” of the “servants or slaves of sin,” of the “liberty of the sons of God,” of being “led captive by Satan at his will,” of “liberty to the captive,” of “loosing our bonds.” But it is unnecessary to be so particular. For the diction adverted to is ever and anon presenting itself to our eye, as we travel through the sacred record. And indeed we meet with it so often, and are so much accustomed to employ it, that we are apt to understand it literally, to forget that it is originally of a figurative description, and to require some consideration before we recognise its metaphorical character and import. But this only strengthens our assertion when we say, that in this way, those who “spake as they were moved

by the Holy Ghost," have stigmatised and proscribed slavery, and lauded and consecrated liberty, even more strongly than they could well have done by the most distinct and unequivocal declarations ; and that the Spirit of God himself may, therefore, be considered as testifying that within the sphere of our mortal existence, and as far as our temporal weal is concerned, to be a slave is the basest style and state of man, and that to be a freeman is his highest distinction, and his truest glory.

Were it necessary I might dwell upon one great and important fact in the annals of the Bible, from which the view that I have been taking derives material support. I refer to the slavery of the Israelites under Pharaoh and his people. And I refer, not merely to the compassion which God manifested for the Israelites as suffering from the capricious cruelties and grievous exactions of their oppressors, nor merely to the judgments which he inflicted on the taskmasters, to whose tyranny they were subjected, nor merely to the extraordinary deliverance which he accomplished for them when the cry of their distress had come up into his ears. I refer not merely to these circumstances, though they might be fairly insisted upon as demonstrations of God's displeasure against those who keep their fellow-creatures in the thralldom of slavery. But I refer to the use made of this passage of sacred history, in relation to spi-

ritual things. It is alluded to in the Bible as giving a just and affecting view of the bitterness of those calamities of which sin is productive, in the case of such as are under its dominion, and of the happiness of being rescued from these, and carried beyond their influence, and beyond their reach. The bringing of the Israelites by the mighty hand and the outstretched arm of Jehovah, "out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage," is spoken of as an instituted type of that infinitely greater salvation which was afterwards wrought out for them, and for "all the ends of the earth," by the interposition of the same grace and of the same power. And the ordinance of the passover was divinely established to commemorate it as an event of high moment and of grateful recollection, just as the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, coming in place of the Passover was subsequently established to show forth that eternal redemption which Christ secured for the souls of men, and to perpetuate the remembrance of those marvellous means by which it was effected.

And surely when we reflect, that not only are the terms bondage and freedom applied by the pen of inspiration, as fit and expressive signs of that accursed thing *sin*, and of that glorious thing *salvation* ; but when a fact such as that which we have quoted, and in which the meaning of

these terms is so strikingly realized, is recorded by the finger of God, as significant and emblematical of the sin which his own Son died to expiate, and of the salvation which his own Son died to accomplish in behalf of our fallen race, we cannot for a moment hesitate to admit that hereby is bondage stamped with the deep and indelible mark of his disapprobation, and freedom proclaimed as that which is the object of his complacent regard, and as that for which his rational offspring are born and destined.

II. In the *second* place, opposition to slavery, and countenance to freedom, are given by the whole spirit, and genius, and tendency of Christianity.

I do not rest upon any precise statement or precept in which we find our doctrine explicitly and expressly taught. At the same time, were I to enter fully or minutely into the discussion, I could at least show that the contrary doctrine is not to be found in Scripture. In the Old Testament you may see permission granted to practise slavery in particular circumstances ; but this took place under a special constitution, was appointed of God in adaptation to certain specific exigencies or occasions, and while it did not devolve, in the form of a right, on any class of people, or on society at large, was in manifest contrariety to the general rule, which required

men to love their neighbours as themselves, and was denounced, punished, and put down, where the practice was introduced, as in the case of the Egyptians and Israelites, without the intervention of God's righteous and sovereign authority. And in the New Testament, although no direct prohibition is issued against it, in the terms and with the form of a divine enactment, yet it is very plainly understood, that the privilege of asserting and enjoying their freedom was recognised, as belonging of right, to those who were in a state of slavery; they are only required to waive that privilege, and to continue in their servitude, in order to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," who were apt to allege that the Gospel warranted and encouraged a dissolution of all the bonds of civil obligation on the part of those who embraced it; and thus it became their duty, by the sacrifice of personal ease and comfort, to forward its progress and prosperity in the world.

Such will be found to be the correct view of what is said or decreed on the subject of slavery in the Holy Scriptures. I look not, however, to distinct prohibitions or injunctions on that point. I appeal to something which, if not more palpable in its aspect, is much more significant in its meaning, and much more certain in its effects. I appeal to the inherent and efficacious power of Christianity, as determining all in whom it really dwells to aspire after liberty as the ob-

ject of their keen ambition—to cleave to it as the object of their fond and decided attachment. If you introduce the principles and sentiments of Christianity into the heart of any individual, you introduce into his heart the very elements of freedom—you infuse that which he feels to be at eternal variance with every species of bondage—you prepare him for throwing off the yoke, with an energy which may be calm and secret, but which is also potent and irresistible in its operations. Let his faith be strong in the truths of revelation, and let him experience their practical influence, and the consequence is, that, without waiting to compare what he is with what he ought to be, or calculating on the advantages of exchanging the one situation for the other, he is constrained, as it were, by instinct, to aim at the transition, and to seek for disenthralment from the tyranny that presses him to the earth. The restraints by which he was formerly fettered, and the oppressions to which he formerly submitted, were tolerable to a mind subdued and degraded by its wrongs; but the tone of feeling induced by that knowledge which he has acquired, and by the renewal which has taken place in his moral constitution, is such as no longer to endure what, even in the time of his darkness and debasement, he bewailed or hated as a grievance. He does not engage in a process of reasoning on the subject,—he is not conscious of tracing any

particular movements among his affections,—he does not enter into any computation of worldly interests. The impulse that actuates him is a necessary and involuntary result of that revolution which has been effected in his whole nature. There is a something within him which is abhorrent of whatsoever goes to constitute him a slave. His soul has acquired an elasticity which makes him impatient of the treatment that has hitherto crushed him into littleness and insignificance, prompts him to cast off, as if by physical action, the pressure of injury, and violence, and scorn, under which he had long and hopelessly groaned, and bids him rise, with the silent and resistless force of nature, to that place in the creation of God, in which alone, as his congenial clime, he can breath, and live, and be happy.

But while we attribute to Christianity this efficient influence in producing the love and the assertion of liberty, even when those who pay to it that spontaneous tribute, are not aware of the mode in which it works upon them, and act as if they were guided by the simple inspiration of divinity, it is by no means difficult to discover and to understand how the views, and susceptibilities, and principles, and hopes, imparted to them by such a religion, should animate them with an invincible abhorrence of slavery, and a determined aspiration after the enjoyment of freedom.

The very first doctrine which revelation impresses on the belief of a Christian is that of the natural equality of our species, as made of one blood, formed into one family, called to one inheritance. Whether they be viewed as still possessing their original state and destiny, or as fallen from it by sin, or as restored to it by mercy, they are all on a level in the sight of that great Being who is their common Lord, and with whom there neither is nor can be any "respect of persons." A difference may subsist in the degree of personal endowments, in external circumstances, in what may be called the mere accidents of created existence. But in every thing that is essential to them as rational, accountable, immortal creatures, there is no distinction. From the highest to the lowest from the most learned to the most illiterate, from the strongest to the feeblest, amidst all the varieties which mark them, and all the chances and changes that befall them, still they occupy the same place as God's offspring, and are linked to him by the same ties, and share in the same great destinies which he awards. His holy image was primarily stamped upon our race—by our race was that image forfeited and lost—and the scheme devised and promulgated for its restoration comprehends our race in its purposes and its arrangements. This the Christian sees to be clearly and emphatically laid down in that char-

from which all his rights in the capacity of Christian are derived. When, therefore, any of his fellows would make him or would keep him a slave, and thus maintain a property in him as if he were of a different and a meaner order, and on a level with the beasts that perish, he beholds in that an usurpation of the prerogative of God, whose he is as well as they are—a violation of that principle by which, according to God's appointment, every man is the brother of every man, whether in sin or in salvation—a robbery of those original rights which God as Creator, and Redeemer, and Governor of the world, has conferred upon him in common with the very persons who would treat him as the oxen that plough their fields. And beholding such an encroachment on what the book of inspiration has revealed to him as a primary and fundamental truth in which he is individually, and deeply, and necessarily concerned, it is impossible that a holy and a high-wrought indignation should not fill his bosom ; and it is impossible that this indignation should not animate him to attempt, with no ordinary zeal, the recovery of that station which God commanded him to hold in his moral universe, and of which a creature like himself has basely, daringly, impiously despoiled him.

Again, suppose the Christian to contemplate habitually, as he must be supposed to do, the

death of Christ as endured for his sake, and you cannot fail to perceive that slavery will be insupportable to his predominant feelings. Had he continued an outcast from God's favour, under the condemning sentence of the law, and doomed to everlasting destruction, and had he been sensible of this, or had nothing occurred to give him a contrary impression, oppressive treatment would not have been so foreign to his character and condition, and might not have excited any vehement degree of aversion and resistance. But the case is quite altered when he thinks of the honour which has been put upon him, both by the salvation he has experienced, and by the method which has been employed to secure it. Such value has he possessed in the compassionate regard of God, that God has delivered him from the ruin that he merited, and brought him back into a state of reconciliation, and divine friendship, and heavenly hope; that for this end he commissioned his own Son to become incarnate, and "in the likeness of sinful flesh," to suffer and to die upon a cross; that he appoints his Holy Spirit to make over the benefits of Christ's mediation to the object of his love, and "seal him unto the day of redemption;" and that he never ceases to watch over him, and to care for him, till he is safely lodged in the habitations of celestial glory. All this, no doubt, is connected with humility on the part of the Christian, con-

sidering how undeserving he is of the dignity to which he has been raised. But still to the greatness of that dignity he cannot be insensible. And he is neither fully alive to it, nor sufficiently grateful for it, nor acting at all worthy of it, if he does not feel disdainful of the bonds, and stripes, and despotic barbarities, by which wicked men would vilify and degrade what the Lord of all has so miraculously distinguished and exalted. Having received such a testimony to the preciousness of his being from the great God of heaven and of earth, as is to be found in the institution of the Gospel—seeing that his nature has been consecrated by its union with the divine, in the person of the Redeemer, and by its being made the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost—emancipated in soul and body from guilt and corruption and death—elevated to a place among the sons of God, and constituted an heir of the crown of righteousness and glory which fadeth not away ; it would be a renunciation of all natural and of all gracious feeling, were he not to spurn from him the very thought of being bought and sold as a piece of sordid merchandise, and doomed to toil and to suffer, and to prostrate himself at the bidding of a tyrant, who has no sympathy with the costliness of his present privileges, and none with the grandeur of his eternal portion. And though far from cherishing pride, because he has been called by divine grace to a filial alliance

with the great Jehovah, and to the assured expectation of sitting upon that throne, high and lifted up, which the triumphant Saviour now occupies, he is ready to cast all the badges of distinction with which he has been invested, at the feet of him by whom they have been conferred, and in imitation of his example, meekly and humbly to “condescend to men of low estate,” yet there is a power in the nobleness of his new vocation, and in the loftiness of his regenerated spirit, which lifts him above the drudgery and the baseness of bondage, and forbids him to stoop for a moment to any thing so mean and so despicable as that. Having a divine title to call God his Father, it is the dictate of his inmost heart that he cannot be the slave of man; and he feels that he ought to tread the soil of freedom, because he hopes ere long to tread the soil of immortality.

The same thing may be anticipated from the Christian by considering the perfection of moral principle, and of moral sentiment, to which he has been brought by the religion that he believes. Every species of iniquity assumes a deeper and a darker hue in his eyes than it ever assumed before. Wheresoever it prevails, and by whomsoever it is committed, it meets with his unqualified hatred, and his resolute opposition. And he is not satisfied till he has used every means, and put forth every endeavour for its discouragement

or its suppression. This being the case, he cannot but set himself against that injustice and inhumanity which seem to be essential to the nature, or inseparable from the practice of slavery,—that is to say, he cannot but set himself to regain their freedom for those unhappy persons who have been made the victims of that immoral system. And if he recognises it as a duty to perform this achievement in behalf of others, with whom perhaps he is only connected by the common ties of humanity, surely he must also recognise it as a duty to perform it in his own behalf. It is an effort not dictated by selfishness, which Christianity condemns as a vice, but by an enlightened regard to his own welfare, which Christianity enjoins as a virtue: and it is stimulated and enforced by that abhorrence of all sin which Christianity absolutely requires, and uniformly fosters in its real votaries. The violence done to his rights, and the havoc made in his comforts, are not the less criminal and detestable that he feels them to be injurious; nor is he less entitled, or less bound, to aim at the subversion of what is so contrary to the law of God, because that change would be attended with the attainment of relief and happiness. It may be right for the Christian, in certain conjunctures, or in particular circumstances, to submit to the evils of slavery: but, then, this is the grace of patience which he exercises in obedience to the same authority which inculcates hos-

tility to all acts and systems of transgression, and is compatible with a full sense of the enormity of that guilt from which he suffers, and with a heartfelt, and fixed, and decided inclination to resist it doings, and to destroy its existence : just as he should be resigned when visited with poverty, or disease, or any other natural distress, though all the while these are the objects of his aversion, and he is diligently labouring to get them alleviated or removed. His obligation to withstand the progress and to pull down the dominion of all unrighteousness and cruelty, is perpetually present to his mind as flowing directly from the doctrines, and the maxims, and the precepts, and the examples of the Scripture record ; and not only believing, but knowing from experience, that these are characteristic of slavery in its origin, in its continued operations, in its practical effects, Christianity, through the medium of its moral influence, will determine him to pray with all fervour, to plead with all importunity, to contend with all earnestness and perseverance, that he may escape from under its iniquitous domination. And in proportion as his mind is instructed in the divine law, imbued with love for that rectitude and goodness which it enjoins, and pervaded by abhorrence of the wickedness which it prohibits, in the same proportion will he hate the system of bondage by which he is enchained, and in the same

proportion will he struggle for its overthrow and its annihilation.

I might carry this illustration to a much greater length ; but enough I presume has been said to demonstrate that Christianity, in all the views that can be taken of it, is directly calculated to render those who are truly governed by it inimical to slavery, and studious to be delivered from its burden. And I shall only add, as confirmatory of what we have advanced, this very instructive fact, that such as are interested in retaining their fellow-creatures in the fetters which they have put upon them, do generally deprecate and repel the attempts that are made to let in upon them the light of the Gospel, and to make them experimentally acquainted with what God has revealed for their instruction and their guidance. Some of them may not object to their slaves being taught religion, provided it be a religion of forms—provided it consist in lessons of patience and submission—or provided it be only so much as will avoid the stigma and the reproach of religion being altogether excluded. But they will not, because they know that they dare not, allow Christianity to be inculcated in the full import of its truth, and in the strict obligation of its laws, and in the unbending nobleness of its spirit. And, in general, they manifest an unconquerable reluctance to tolerate those ministers of Christ who

would faithfully inform the understanding, and touch the conscience, and direct the conduct, of that abject population whom they are resolved to keep in subjection to their capricious sway, and in subserviency to their worldly gains. If left to themselves, and not forced or shamed into partial compliances with what is nothing but decent in Christian professors, and with what, in case of refusal, might be followed by more serious requisitions, they would not permit one of their enslaved dependants to learn any thing of that message of mercy and salvation which bespeaks him from whom it proceeds to be the friend, and the patron, and the protector of liberty. And from the language which they openly hold, and the restrictions which they actually impose, they plainly acknowledge that Christianity and freedom are indissolubly linked—that the revealed doctrine of God is utterly hostile to their arbitrary domination over man—that if the torch of sacred truth once shines upon the path of those who now crouch under their sway, and tremble at their frown, that becomes a path in which they will soon begin the march of emancipation, and by which they will assuredly and speedily regain the birthright of independence, which has been so unjustly taken away from them.

III. In the *third* and last place, Christianity leads those by whom it is believed, and loved, and

practised, to make every effort for asserting their personal freedom, because they feel that slavery is most unfavourable to its cultivation and its progress.

A man that is seriously concerned about remaining steadfast and making improvement in his Christian vocation, cannot be indifferent to those outward circumstances in which he may happen to be situated, seeing it is the dictate of sacred Scripture, and the lesson of common observation and experience, that on the nature of these circumstances a great deal of his religious comfort and prosperity will depend. Aware that certain influences tend to do him serious mischief in that respect, and that certain influences tend to establish his principles, and to promote his advancement in the good way of the Lord, he is careful, as far as possible, to escape from the former and to surround himself with the latter. And he will pursue this conduct in proportion as he estimates the worth of spiritual freedom, and desires to grow in godliness and in grace. But as a state of slavery is, in all its circumstances, diametrically opposed and singularly inauspicious to his steadfastness in the faith, and to his fidelity in the obedience of the Gospel, the power of Christianity must operate both upon his sense of duty and his sense of interest, to prevent him from continuing passively and contentedly in that state, and to ripen his earnest desires into active

endeavours for deliverance from its moral disadvantages.

Now that a state of slavery is such, in this view, as we have represented it, no one can venture to deny who knows any thing accurately of its leading features, and its ordinary or necessary accompaniments.

This is sufficiently demonstrated by the broad fact, that those who are interested in keeping others in bondage, usually maintain their interest by also keeping them in ignorance of true religion, which so obviously proscribes the relation between master and slave, as unjust, inhuman, and oppressive. For a system which requires for its stability and its permanence, that a particular class of men should be destitute of the knowledge that maketh wise unto salvation, or that they should acquire as little of it as can possibly be imparted, goes directly to arrest or to retard the progress of religion among that class, by depriving them of the main and primary instrument by which it is to be rooted in them, and nourished, and made to bring forth fruit in abundance. If the way of life is not shown to them, they cannot walk in it ; or if they are only allowed to get occasional and imperfect glimpses of its course, they cannot walk in it securely and steadily and successfully ; they cannot avoid its dangers—they cannot surmount its difficulties—they cannot reach with certainty its proper and blessed ter-

mination. And this will be felt by every individual who in spite of the barriers placed between him and divine truth, has yet, through some extraordinary interposition, been made savingly acquainted with it; and it will be felt by him as a grievance for which there is no adequate remedy in any of the peculiarities of his condition. Nay, if shame or necessity on the part of those whose immunities are to be upheld by shutting out the light, should provide sacred instruction, it is hardly conceivable that the persons who are allowed or appointed to administer it, should have the privilege of declaring freely and unreservedly "the whole counsel of God." There are certain articles of faith—certain points of moral obligation—certain declarations of the divine will, which they must either totally suppress, or unfairly exhibit, or so coldly urge as to divest them of all their meaning and efficiency. They cannot be entrusted with the full and unequivocal discharge of their functions as the messengers of heaven. And hence the reluctance with which their ministrations are accepted, and the jealousy with which they are watched, and the resentment with which they are treated, if they have been so zealous as to publish or to inculcate those maxims of Scripture which bring into question, however remotely, the lawfulness or the blessings of slavery: and hence the peculiar favour that is conferred upon the men who, pretending to com-

municate the revelation of God as he has given it, wrap it all up in outward and useless ceremonies, which only foster superstition in the minds of those whom they are employed to awe and to delude—or preach non-resistance to the most cruel and most arbitrary exactions, and uncomplaining patience under wrongs that are atrocious and multiplied beyond enduring, as the first and most essential duty of a Christian—or so trim, and mutilate, and misrepresent, the doctrines of the Bible as to convert that volume, which was intended to secure the rights of all men upon earth, as well as to prepare them for the happiness of heaven, into an authority for sustaining the usurped prerogatives of the tyrant, and for perpetuating the degradation and the misery of his slaves.

Wherefore, if it be in the nature or in the history of the case, that either religious knowledge is to be wholly withheld, or that it is to be but partially and deceitfully conveyed, it is plain that Christianity cannot thrive at all, or that it cannot thrive as it ought to do, among those who are in a state of bondage. And from this it follows not only that all of us to whom Christianity is dear, and who are actuated by the compassion which it breathes, will do our utmost to put a final period to that mighty evil, but that those who, placed in subjection to it, have nevertheless, through some peculiar vouchsafement of

Providence, learned experimentally the value of the Gospel, must feel themselves disposed to mutiny against a despotism which would forbid them to become more familiar with what is so precious to them as the servants of God, and the expectants of a heavenly recompense, and to adopt every method which they can use consistently with their deference for the divine will, for emerging into a situation where they may, unchallenged and unrestricted, set themselves to know more and more of the grace, and the truth and the will, of that Saviour who has "made them free indeed."

Need I, my friends, for the purpose of confirming our argument,—need I remind you of the manifold disadvantages, besides the radical and incurable one now adverted to, under which the victims of slavery labour as to their religious and moral well-being? If they know and prize Christianity, it is enough to make them break the unhallowed chains by which they are bound, that these are chains also of spiritual ignorance, fastened and tightened upon them the more, that they may not reach the fountain of truth and knowledge, and drink of it freely for the life and the refreshment of their souls. But, independently of this, need I remind you, that they are prohibited, when their own experienced need requires it, from engaging in those exercises and pursuits by which their piety may be warmed,

their affections purified, their comfort enhanced ? Need I remind you, that where filthy lucre is the moving spring which guides and influences those whom they must obey, there will be remorselessly wrung from them the toil of every hour that can be spared from necessary rest ; and that the Sabbath, which, to all the free disciples of Christ, is a day of instruction, and repose, and prayer, and consolation, will bring with it to *them* no such blessings and no such enjoyments ? Need I remind you how apt they are, from the combined force of temptation and authority, to become a prey to the brutal passions and appetites of the worldlings that recognise in them nothing higher than the devoted instruments of their pleasure or their gain ? Need I remind you of the tendency of all the iniquitous commands, of all the relentless inflictions, of all the capricious tyrannies, to which they must submit from those who claim in them the right of property, to counteract the play of generous affection, to harden their hearts against the influence of moral sentiment, and to make them the very opposite of that to which the Gospel, if undisturbed and unthwarted in its operations, is calculated to mould their feelings and their character ? Need I remind you, in short, of the native effect of slavery to paralyse the noblest faculties, and deaden the best sensibilities of all who are subjected to its malignant power, to reduce them

in their desires, and in their habits, to that mere animal level from which the Gospel was intended to raise them, and to render even the means of improvement which may have fallen into their lot, scanty and inadequate as they generally are, altogether inefficient for attaining the end which they were divinely instituted to subserve? I need not remind you of these things, which are the conclusions of reason,—the lessons of experience—the enunciations of fact. And I need not add, that, in this view also, Christianity lifts its voice decidedly and practically against the abominations of slavery, and against the doctrine of its apologists and defenders; and that as surely as we consider the interests of personal religion to be of paramount importance, and its cultivation to be of indispensable necessity, so surely will we protest and contend against a system so hostile to it in all its aspects and in all its bearings, and so surely will every slave who has embraced the faith, and imbibed the spirit, and tasted the comforts, of the Gospel, feeling the jeopardy in which he stands, and the disadvantages that press upon him, in consequence of the enmity that subsists between his bondage and his Christianity, regard himself as warranted and called upon to pant after deliverance from the thralldom in which his soul does not and cannot prosper, and after the liberty under whose vigorous and kindly guardianship alone it is that, by

God's blessing, those can grow up to the maturity of moral excellence, whom Christ has plucked out of the spoiler's hand, and invested with the freedom of the sons of God.

Thus have I attempted to make good the proposition with which I set out. And if I have succeeded in the attempt, I cannot but congratulate you, and I do for myself feel it refreshing, that we have rescued liberty from the libel that has been virtually directed against it, and deprived slavery of the vindication that has been pleaded for it, under the great and venerable sanction of Christianity. Shame! that any should have been found to speak lightly of liberty whose worth is so testified—whose benefits are so numerous and so rich. Moralists have praised it—poets have sung it—the Gospel has taught and breathed it—patriots and martyrs have died for it. As a temporal blessing, it is beyond all comparison and above all price. It is the air we breathe—the food we eat—the raiment that clothes us—the sun that enlightens and vivifies and gladdens all on whom it shines. Without it what are honours and riches, and all similar endowments? They are the trappings of a hearse—they are the garnishings of a sepulchre. And with it, the crust of bread, and the cup of water, and the lowly hovel, and the barren rock, are luxuries which it teaches and enables us to rejoice

in. He who knows what liberty is, and can be glad and happy when placed under a tyrant's rule, and at the disposal of a tyrant's caprice, is like the man who can laugh and be in merry mood at the grave where he has just deposited all that should have been loveliest in his eye, and all that should have been dearest to his heart. Shame on those who have so far taxed their ingenuity, and so far consulted their selfishness, and so far forgotten their Christian name, as to apologize for the existence of slavery by extolling the incomparable superiority of spiritual freedom, and dragging in the aid and the countenance of Scripture mis-stated or misunderstood! For what is slavery, and what does it do? It darkens and degrades the intellect—it paralyses the hand of industry—it is the nourisher of agonizing fears and of sullen revenge—it crushes the spirit of the bold—it belies the doctrines, it contradicts the precepts, it resists the power, it sets at defiance the sanctions of religion—it is the tempter, and the murderer, and the tomb of virtue,—and either blasts the felicity of those over whom it domineers, or forces them to seek for relief from their sorrows, in the gratifications and the mirth and the madness of the passing hour.

And slavery being thus so destructive of all that is good, and so fruitful of all that is evil, may we not be allowed to speak, as it becomes the subject, of that oppressed and degraded and

unhappy portion of our fallen race which constitutes the black population of our West India Islands? Imagine not that this is a trifling or illegitimate application of our doctrine ; for were it applied to even one human being, unconnected with us by any special bond, the charity of the Gospel would justify it : but it is applied to eight hundred thousand human beings connected with us by many ties, which neither justice nor humanity, neither religion nor policy, neither reciprocal obligation nor community of interests, will permit us to disregard.

O my friends, it is difficult to restrain our indignation when we think of so many of our fellow-men who were created after the image of that God who created us—who are as much concerned in the costly expiation of Christ as we are—and whose destinies stretch into an eternity of existence as well as ours—loaded with cruel and ignominious chains, and bought and sold and treated “like the beasts that perish.” And when I look abroad to that land of despots and of slaves, and think of all the prostration of intellect, and all the debasement of the immortal spirit, and all the tears, and groans, and agonies, which it must comprehend within its narrow limits, I cannot but recollect, at the same time, with shame and sorrow, that this system of guilt and misery exists, and is deliberately allowed to exist, under the sanction of those who feel what

freedom is, and would die for it,—who have received the Gospel of mercy, and bless God for it,—who prize the welfare of humanity, and boast of the sacrifices they would make for it. And amidst the contemplation of so much injustice on the part of those to whom the Almighty has been kindest, and so much unmerited suffering on the part of those to whom he has been most sparing of his benefits, methinks I see the face of an offended God frowning on our guilty land, as he lends his ear to the cries which ascend to him from that “house of bondage” which we have helped to fill with cruelty and with crime. And if there be holiness in his character, and honour in his government of the world, of which it would be impiety to doubt, then unless we repent, and evince our penitence, not by empty professions and by partial amendments, but by “undoing the heavy burden,” “breaking every yoke,” and “letting the oppressed go free,” there must be a coming vengeance which will dash in pieces our unrighteous dominion, and lay all our glory in the dust. “Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?” “Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thy hand; forget not the humble.” “Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man; seek out his wickedness till thou find none,”—“that the man of the earth may no more oppress.”

Brethren, when mourning over the desolations

of slavery, and fearful of that wrath which these must have provoked against us, it is in some measure refreshing to see what is done by good men in order to mitigate the calamities which it is not yet, it seems, thought expedient to remove,—if indeed the attempted mitigation of these calamities, instead of leading on to their final removal, do not furnish a pretext for their continuance, diminish the general abhorrence of that system from which they spring, and fix them down for ever on their hapless and unpitied victims.* And surely it becomes us to co-operate with those who are engaged in such a work of benevolence, and to do our part with all energy and with all boldness, in hastening it on to its ultimate accomplishment. Our duty in this case—as men, as Christians, as friends of human liberty, as patriots and philanthropists—our duty in this case is plain and urgent. It is to lift up our testimony against that which is so atrocious in its character and so calamitous in its results, and to lend our liberal, and our energetic, and our united aid for pulling down such an edifice of injustice and oppression to the very ground. And it is moreover to send Christ's offer of spiritual emancipation to those who are still under its galling bondage—to prevail upon them to receive him as the Saviour of their souls—to train them as far as may be to the holiness

* See Appendix B.

which his Spirit is vouchsafed to work in them ---so that, weighed down though they be with the burden of a detested and a detestable servitude, their minds may be disenthralled, that they may enjoy "the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free," that they may be cheered amidst their sorrows and their trials with the belief of a presiding Divinity, who will "make all things work together for their good"—that they may be animated with hope when they lie down in that place where "the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest"—and that they may be prepared for traversing the scene and mingling in the glories and the blessedness of that immortality, amidst whose halleluiahs to Him who redeemed them, their wrongs, and their captivity, and their sufferings, shall neither be felt nor remembered any more.

SERMON XVI.

CHRIST WITHOUT SIN.

1 PETER ii. 22.

Who did no sin.

THE Apostles of our Lord notice with much complacency the individual virtues which dignified or adorned his character, just as the Evangelists had related the actions in which they were displayed, with much genuine and unaffected simplicity. But while they mention particular virtues, in order to recommend these to the practice of such as they intended to instruct, they do not lose sight of the effect which they may, either singly or collectively, produce in establishing and illustrating the merit of Him, in whose deportment they appeared. And not unfrequently they seem to have taken a combined view of the whole,—to have meditated on every part of Christ's history,—to have gathered into one assemblage all the varied expressions of excellence which occurred to them as they proceeded in the

interesting study,—to have traced them up to those principles of the inner man which gave them their value, and stand for every other act of goodness which there might be no other opportunity of performing,—and then to have drawn the general, or rather unqualified conclusion, which such a deduction justified, that he respecting whom it was made “did no sin.”

This assertion is most important in many points of view, and deserves your serious attention. And that you may derive from it the instruction and the comfort which it is fitted to convey, we shall, *first*, make a few remarks on the moral perfection which is here ascribed to Christ; and, *secondly*, apply it for the purpose of confirming our belief in the truth of his mission, of encouraging our dependence upon him as the foundation of our hope, and of directing us in that course of life which we must pursue as preparatory to our attainment of heaven.

I. First, we are to make a few remarks on the moral perfection here attributed to Christ.

Christ “did no sin.” This phrase, according to its ordinary acceptation, means nothing more than harmlessness; and is not understood to comprehend any positive or superior excellence. But as applied to Christ, it means a great deal more: and, indeed, it should, in every case, mean a great deal more, considering what the divine

law prescribes, and what sin is in reference to it. Sin essentially consists in transgressing or refusing obedience to the divine law. And the law does not merely prohibit many things which we are accustomed to call sinful,—it also enjoins many things which we are accustomed to call holy. The injunctions are as much a part of the law as the prohibitions. And, consequently, whether we run counter to the one or to the other,—whether we do the things which are prohibited or neglect to do the things which are enjoined, we are chargeable with the commission of sin. He who will not relieve the distress of his neighbour when he has it in his power, is as really a sinner as he who wantonly or deliberately inflicted the injury which called for this expression of kindness. And the man who will not observe the precept which bids him search the Scriptures is as truly criminal as the man who vainly swears by the name of God, or profanes his ordinances, by some act of open and avowed contempt. It is only when a moral agent performs every deed which is commanded as well as abstains from every deed which is forbidden; it is only when he is at once free from all upon which the interdict of heaven has been laid, and possessed of all which the authority of heaven has required; it is only when his attainments are conformable, and when they come up, to those manifold exactions of passive and of active submission, of negative purity

and of substantial worth, which have been put upon him by that great Being under whose government he is now placed, and by whom he is to be judged at last;—it is only then that the language of the text describes him, and that he can properly be said to have “done no sin.”

Now, it is in this strict and elevated sense, that Christ “did no sin.” Judging of him by the perfect and unaccommodating standard of God’s holy law, that expression, as it respects Christ, is the literal expression of justice and of truth. All the requirements of the law were fulfilled in the character which he exhibited to the world. Nor can the eye of the most scrutinizing observer discover in it one feature of non-conformity, or one act of opposition, to the will of him who ruleth over all.

There may be particular virtues, or particular modifications and degrees of virtue, of which his life will afford you no instance. These are wanting, however, only for this reason—that in the execution of his appointed work, and in the peculiar sphere in which he was destined to move, no opportunities occurred for practising them. It is enough, that during the whole period of his humiliation, and in all the vicissitudes through which he passed, and amid the multiplied temptations to which he was exposed, he discharged the obligations which were laid upon him, and did nothing which was inconsistent with the least

or with the greatest of them ; and that the occasions afforded him for cultivating righteousness were so numerous, and so diversified, and so much connected with difficulty and trial, as to demonstrate the existence of that supreme love of righteousness, and that entire devotedness to its exercise, which would have been equally displayed at all other times and in all other circumstances. And this is what we affirm of Christ. The path of obedience which was assigned to him, was a long and a rugged one, and he walked in it with undeviating steadfastness, and he walked in it to the very end—manifesting from the very commencement to the very termination of his progress, an unqualified and unreserved acquiescence in the demands of God's law. He “did no sin ;” and when we say so, we do not mean that he was holy in comparison even of the best of men, or that he was holy in comparison of the highest standard which mere human wisdom has ever had recourse to, but that he was holy in the most rigid sense of the term—far beyond these and all similar comparisons—even according to the divine commandments in their purest spirit, and in their exceeding breadth, and in their ceaseless obligations.

In speaking with approbation of our fellow mortals, we are generally necessitated to fix upon some one leading virtue by which they have distinguished themselves from their brethren,

and on account of which alone they have become the objects of admiration and praise; but with regard to Christ, we perceive all the virtues adorning his character, and we feel at a loss in determining to which of them we should give the pre-eminence—his piety to God being equalled by his benevolence to men, and none of them surpassing his meekness under provocation, his patience amidst suffering, and his fortitude at death.—In speaking with approbation of our fellow-mortals, we are frequently obliged to dwell upon the excellence of their external conduct, and to conceal the principles and motives by which they were influenced, although upon the nature of these depends, in a great measure, their title to our good opinion and our applause: But with regard to Christ, so far as they have been developed to us, or so far as we can trace them from the uniform aspect and tenor of his doings, the principles on which he proceeded were as divine, and the motives which impelled him as disinterested and worthy, as the actions themselves which he performed were agreeable to the spirit and the letter of those enactments, to which he subjected himself when he was “made under the law.”—In speaking with approbation of our fellow-mortals, we must always accompany our eulogium with certain exceptions to their disadvantage—certain shortcomings which detract from the splendour or from the value of the good qua-

lities for which we commend them, or certain vices which counterbalance them and render our commendations less cordial and less unqualified : But with regard to Christ, we can discern no such imperfection or demerit in any one branch of his deportment ; we perceive not a single act, however insulated and transient, to which we can attach the epithet of evil ; and we see every virtue in its most unalloyed form, and in its most exalted exercise—devotion, most ardent and unaffected—charity, without any admixture of selfishness—humility, undebased by meanness—self-denial, which never yielded to the tempter—patience and resignation, which no suffering could shake, and which all the terrors of death could not for a moment subdue.—In speaking with approbation of our fellow-mortals, we are always supposed, even when our laudatory language is most unbounded and unmeasured in its expressions, to allow that we wish not to be strictly apprehended, and to leave it to be understood that there is need for that charity which seeks not to detect the failings of humanity, and tries to cover them when they are known : But with regard to Christ, this charity has no room to operate ; it sees no failings to turn away from : it knows of nothing which claims or which requires its indulgence ; exempt from every moral defect, and “ glorious in its holiness,” his character appeals, not to the charity of man, but to the law

of God as its rule and its judge ; and he to whom it belongs comes not one iota behind the perfection of that rule, and is pronounced by that judge to be altogether without sin.

Nor is this moral perfection either an imaginary or an exaggerated attribute of Christ. As certainly as we know that he lived and died, so certainly do we know that in his life and in his death he was without sin. For this we have every degree of evidence of which the case admits, or which can be desired to satisfy our minds. We have the express testimony of those who were personally and intimately acquainted with Christ, whose familiar intercourse enabled them to form a most correct judgment of his merits, and whose own integrity raises their declaration above the suspicion of falsehood or fraud. We have more than their opinion—they have furnished us with materials upon which we may exercise our own understanding, and from which we may draw our own conclusions ; and in the artless, candid, and circumstantial narrative of his life which they have laid before us, they have afforded the most ample and satisfactory grounds for the affirmation of the text. Nor is it the mere attestation of his friends and followers with which we are provided. Even Judas, who knew him well, but who allowed himself to be overcome by temptation, and to act the part of a traitor, acknowledged that he was

guilty of betraying innocent blood, and instead of alleging any criminality in Christ, which he would have done if he had been aware of any, to excuse or to justify the baseness he had committed, he was so filled with remorse,—remorse proportioned no doubt to the blameless excellence of his Master—that he sought refuge in a violent death. Nay, the enemies of Christ when they reproached him, reproached him for conduct which had nothing in it but condescension, and fidelity, and love; and when they accused him of crimes, for the purpose of getting him condemned to die, they accused him of what he was notoriously innocent. As a proof of their own consciousness of this, they endeavoured to substantiate their charges against him by suborning false witnesses, and in demonstration of the utter groundlessness and wickedness of these charges, the very judge before whom they dragged him, and from whom they extorted a reluctant sentence, consigning him to the cross, freely and repeatedly confessed that he could find no fault in him. And as if to put the case beyond all controversy, and beyond all doubt, while in the midst of those persecutions to which he was cruelly exposed, he displayed a meekness, a patience, and a magnanimity, which elevated him unspeakably above all Greek and Roman fame, he confidently challenged the revilers by whom he was surrounded to produce a single instance of his violation of

the law of God ;—" which of you" said he " convicteth me of sin ?"—a challenge which none of his adversaries, with all their observation of his conduct, and all their malignant anxiety to find him guilty, ever ventured to accept of, and which to this day remains unanswered and unanswerable. The record is true—true by the testimony of friends, by the confession of foes, by the consent and acknowledgment of all, that the Lord Jesus Christ " did no sin."*

II. Let us now make our application of this truth. It is applicable, as we formerly stated, to various useful purposes.

1. And, *first*, it serves to confirm our belief in the truth of Christ's mission.

This effect is produced in some degree, simply by viewing Christ in the light of a person of good principle, and of excellent character. He holds himself out as a witness. It is to the truth of revelation that he gives his testimony, or rather it is his own divine origin and embassy that he certifies. And, therefore, in proportion to the confidence that we repose in his general worth and integrity, will be the credit that we give to what he says respecting himself, and to the message which he brings from heaven. But his general worth and integrity being so fully brought home

* Appendix C.

to our conviction, we cannot well conceive that in this particular he would attempt to deceive us, and will rather presume, so far as such a circumstance can go, that he has spoken to us the words of verity, or at least that they are deserving of our serious and attentive consideration.

But the argument comes still closer to us than this. Had the author of Christianity been an impostor, it is impossible to conceive that he should have been of such holy and unblemished character as we find him to have been. The depravity of heart which gave birth to such a system of artifice, as in this view he must be supposed to have contrived and published, could not fail to have given birth also to a great variety of crimes and vices. Even though this system had not been employed to cover or to minister to any particular immorality, still it indicated that total want of principle, which is the sure and fertile source of every thing that is abandoned in conduct—which surrenders the mind to the government of every unhallowed passion, and makes it an easy prey to those outward allurements which the world is continually presenting to it. On the supposition that Christ was an impostor, it was no ordinary or harmless deception that he was playing off upon mankind. It was one which implied in it a complete disregard of all that the human mind is accustomed to hold most sacred, and which could not have harmonized or subsisted

with sentiments of strict integrity, of untarnished purity, and of unlimited benevolence. It was founded on the assumption of divine power—it pretended to aim at the divine glory—it affected to promulgate the divine will—it invoked a solemn and visible manifestation of the divine presence. And while it thus blasphemed against God, it trifled with the understanding and the affections of man; and laboured to make him the slave of error in matters that affected the dignity of his reason, and the character of his life, and the whole aspect both of his present and his future condition. It called upon him to believe what was not true, and to do what heaven did not require; and for a long period, and in a thousand cases, to suffer the most relentless persecutions, under the delusive hope of receiving divine support here, and a great recompense of reward hereafter.

Now I ask you, my friends, if it be possible to reconcile such impiety towards God, and such unfeelingness towards men, with that reverence for God, and that tender compassion towards men, by which our Lord was so eminently characterized in every other instance? I ask you if it be possible to reconcile such deep seated and shameless profligacy as this involves, with that uniform regard to all the restraints of religion and all the obligations of morality which distinguished him throughout the whole of his

illustrious career? I ask you, if such light and such darkness—such righteousness and such unrighteousness, could possibly dwell together, and operate together, in the mind and in the conduct of the same individual? I ask you if any fact has ever come under your observation, or if you know of any in the annals of the world, that can give the faintest colour of probability to the hypothesis that Christ could be a deceiver, and yet possessed of that high moral excellence which is ascribed to him? The answer to all these questions must necessarily be in the negative. Christ cannot be a deceiver as to his Gospel, and yet in all other respects without sin. You must either give up the one proposition or the other. You cannot retain both, and be rational. And if you believe that Christ had the moral perfection which the text affirms, you must also believe that he was a true witness, that he came from God, and that his religion is divine.

There is yet another view to be taken of this point. Christ did more than hold himself out as a divine messenger—he held himself out as standing in a peculiar relation to God—as being his only begotten Son—as having the attributes of Deity—as being one with the Father. With these pretensions, his sinfulness, even his commission of one sin, would have been completely inconsistent, and would have rendered them utterly false and groundless. Had he been

merely a messenger from God, and put forth no higher claim on the attention of the world, his claim, like that of the prophets who went before him, might have been sustained, even though he had committed iniquity, or been "overtaken in a fault." But if, after declaring himself to be equal with God, with whom there can be no unrighteousness at all, he had been guilty of the slightest transgression, this would not only have destroyed that lofty pretension, but would have brought overwhelming disrepute on the whole of his testimony and of his message. His perfect freedom from sin, therefore, is essential to the proof of his divine mission. It does not prove that he was God, for he might have been a creature, and yet have been preserved from all unrighteousness by God's almighty power. But as he claimed the honour and asserted the possession of supreme deity, it was necessary that no unrighteousness should cleave to him, otherwise his claim would have been false, and his whole title to be considered as a messenger from heaven discredited and destroyed. And since that claim and that unrighteousness are found together—not united forcibly, or with the least appearance of artifice, but occurring naturally and as it were independently of each other, such an incidental and complete harmony is here presented to us as betokens the divinity of that system in which it finds a place, and affords us an

additional presumptive evidence in favour of "the glorious Gospel."

I have still further to observe, that the sinlessness of Christ is to be viewed as a miracle, which establishes the truth of his mission, as much as any of the miracles which are usually resorted to for this purpose. The wonderful works which he achieved when he raised the dead, or stilled the tempest, were proofs of his divine mission, because no man could do such works except God were with him. And for precisely the same reason, his moral perfection is a proof of his divine mission, because he could not have attained, or possessed, or manifested it, except by the extraordinary presence and supernatural operation of the God of all grace. He was not only holy in a remarkable degree, or holy above all the children of men that have ever appeared, but his holiness had no blemish and no imperfection in it. He "did no sin," in the most absolute and spiritual import of these words. And it was not possible for him to be thus sinless, except by the special interposition of heaven. The laws which govern human nature and human condition were here suspended, as it were, for producing that effect. A person wearing the form of fallen humanity, exhibited not a vestige of the weakness and the wickedness by which, in every other case, fallen humanity has been characterized. The power of temptation, in all

its variety and in all its force, had not more power over him than if it had not existed, though even in its feeblest influence it has had power over every one besides. It conquered Adam, pure as he was when he came from the hand of his Maker, and it conquered the angels who fell, while they were yet holier than ever Adam could have been ; but it never conquered Christ. And in this system of things in which we find ourselves, we can scarcely conceive any thing more truly miraculous, by being more truly indicative of the peculiar intervention of the Almighty, than was the unmixed and immaculate purity of Christ—a position which is equally true, whether we consider his purity as resulting from the elements of that particular condition of our nature which was given to him, or from the divine agency continually employed in guiding and upholding him, or from the operation of both these causes combined. Supposing that he had displayed none of that sovereign virtue to which the powers of others, and the objects and events of the external world were so entirely subject, he displayed in his own power and his own character a perfection of moral excellence, which is sufficient of itself to vindicate all his pretensions as an ambassador from the Eternal. And in this respect he rises far, not only above those individuals that preceded him in the prophetic office, but also above those still more gifted persons who suc-

ceeded him, and of whom he himself said, that they should do even greater works than those which he had done in their presence, because he went to the Father. Many and striking are the miracles which they exhibited before the world, but they themselves were all tainted, more or less, with the depravity of our apostate race, while he, to his manifold tokens of authority over the heavens and the earth, manifested this other token of a present God, as exclusively distinguishing himself, that he “did no sin.”

When, therefore, you contemplate Christ as having done no sin, let the contemplation be employed to strengthen your faith in him as a divine Messenger—to convince you more than ever, and to make you more satisfied with the conviction, that you are believing in one who, in very deed, came from the eternal God, who is invested with power and authority to lay upon you every command, and to subject you to every appointment that he may deem proper for your guidance and your redemption, and into whose mighty hands you may confidently commit the keeping of your souls for time and for eternity.

2. *Secondly*, Let us apply the subject for the purpose of encouraging our dependance upon Christ as the foundation of our hope.

The law of God has demands upon us that must be fully satisfied, before we can obtain his

forgiveness, and enjoy his favour, and be admitted into his heavenly presence. It demands punishment, and it demands obedience; and we must suffer the one and yield the other, either in our own persons or by a substitute. It cannot be in our own persons, for if once subjected to the punishment, our salvation and happiness are entirely out of the question; and even though the punishment for past offences were remitted by an act of sovereign amnesty, we have no ability to render that perfect obedience which the law requires as essential to the safety and acceptance of all its subjects. We are very apt indeed to trust in our own strength for the justification of which as sinners we stand in need. But a little consideration of what our own strength is, and of the achievement to which we propose to apply it, must satisfy us that such a trust is vain and presumptuous, and that if we are to look to any thing in ourselves—to any thing that we have actually done or that we are capable of doing—as the foundation of our hope, we must remain under condemnation, and be finally and utterly undone. Our only refuge, then, is in a substitute; and it is the great business of the Gospel to reveal and set forth this substitute as both willing and able to do for us what we are incompetent to do for ourselves—to fulfil all that righteousness which the law exacts from us, and thus to disarm it of its terrors, to reconcile us to

a just and holy God, and to secure our ultimate admission into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Christ is our substitute. This office is ascribed to him in Scripture with much particularity and with much emphasis. It is he that "takes away our sins by the sacrifice of himself," and he "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Now, in order that our faith in him as our surety, who is to redeem us by his gratuitous and vicarious obedience, may be justified and encouraged, we must have clear and satisfactory demonstrations of his sufficiency for sustaining that important character. And here the divine appointment may be discovered as superseding every other consideration that could be adduced. The fact, indeed, that God has ordained Christ to be "the Lord our righteousness," while it is absolutely indispensable for giving us any measure of reliance on this scheme of redemption, may also be received as a complete guarantee for Christ's possessing all the qualifications which are requisite for its accomplishment and its efficacy. But still our spiritual weakness desiderates more minute and specific information; and that information our heavenly Father gives us when he lays before us the details of Christ's saving work, and the delineation of his saving character. It is with this view especially, that Christ is represented so distinctly, and declared so frequently, to be without

sin. For supposing him to have been otherwise—supposing it to have been stated that he had cherished some sinful temper, or committed some sinful action—or supposing we had been left to conclude, or even to conjecture, that this had really been the case—then our belief in his adequacy to the undertaking he had engaged in, would have been shaken or destroyed. In that case, it would have been impossible for him to merit any thing for us, either in the way of forgiveness or reward. Having violated the law, or failed to give it that perfect submission which it demands, it must have followed, that instead of satisfying it, by making atonement for our guilt, or securing for us any of the blessings which it promises, he would himself have deserved the penalty which it denounces against every transgressor, and have required expiation to be made for his own guilt; and consequently he could not have taken away any portion of our sin, or obtained for us one expression of acceptance with God. Of vast importance, therefore, is it for our confidence, our comfort, and our hope, that Christ is made known to us in the full extent of his moral perfection, and that the divine record concerning him is, that he “did no sin.”

My friends, let this truth be always present to your minds when you think of Christ as the ground of your acceptance; and especially when you look to his death as the sacrifice of atonement

which he offered up for your iniquities, and as the finishing act of that obedience which in your stead he rendered to the law of God. Be not faithless but believing. Let not a sense of your unworthiness and guilt fill your souls with desponding fears and apprehensions. But place unlimited confidence in "the holy one and the just." His sacrifice is faultless. His merit is infinite. His work is perfect. However numerous and aggravated your offences may be, only apply to him in the exercise of genuine faith, and ye shall be redeemed from them all, for ye are redeemed by his precious blood as that "of a lamb, without blemish and without spot." "Holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," he "magnified the law" in your name, and "made it honourable," so that the law is no longer your enemy; and its justice, which formerly awarded you the sentence of condemnation, is now to you to whom his righteousness is imputed, and by whom it is received in faith, the pledge and the security of your peace with God, and your justification unto life eternal. Be "strong in the faith," therefore, "giving glory to God." And remembering Jesus as your surety, think of him as having done no sin, and repose unwavering trust in him as one who on that account can "save you to the uttermost," and "consecrate you for evermore."

3. Finally, let us apply the subject for our direction in that course of life which we must pursue as candidates for heaven.

Though Christ by his unspotted sacrifice and perfect obedience has renewed our title to life and immortality, yet it is still true that without personal holiness we cannot see the Lord. Accordingly, that nothing might be wanting for our complete salvation, the Spirit of God is provided and promised as our sanctifier; and a certain character is prescribed to us as that which results from the influences of the Spirit, and which is requisite to fit us for the celestial world.

This character is pointed out to us by the precepts and maxims of the Gospel. But we have the additional advantage of having it illustrated, and recommended, and enforced, by the example of our Saviour. The exhibition of this example was one, though a subordinate purpose, of his incarnation. He has left it upon record expressly and authoritatively, "that we should follow his steps." And the moral perfection by which it is distinguished gives it a paramount claim on our regard and imitation. It may be expedient and useful that we sometimes and in certain respects take for models of conduct, those of our fellow men who are remarkable for their worth. But even the best and holiest of our

species have their virtues largely intermixed with failings and transgressions. And so corrupt and deceitful are our hearts, that we are apt to copy these with as much care and eagerness, as we do the better qualities with which we are associated.

But when we take the conduct of Christ for our model, we take that which is exempt from all such tendency to mislead or to injure us; for “though tempted in all things like as we are, he was without sin.” His life presents to us a manifestation of all the leading graces which it becomes us to cultivate, without a single approximation to that vice which it is as necessary for us to avoid. It affords us all the good without any of the evil. And if we only follow it faithfully and diligently, we shall walk in the path that assuredly leads to heaven, and shall become gradually meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Be persuaded, then, my friends upon this ground, to set the example of Christ continually before you. Study it with close and unceasing attention. Strive to imbibe its pure and animating spirit. Labour to acquire its highest excellences, as well as its ordinary accomplishments. Let it be your constant aim to be like Christ who “did no sin”—to have “the same mind in you which was in him”—to “walk as he also walked”—to “be perfect even as he was perfect.” As you meditate on his sinless obedience, form the resolution

that to tread in his footsteps will be the object of your ardent ambition, and the subject of your fervent prayers. And do not rest satisfied with a mere general knowledge of the excellence which pervaded and adorned his character. Call up to your remembrance, and let your thoughts dwell upon, the individual virtues of which it was composed. Make yourselves familiarly acquainted with these, so that on every occasion which suggests or admits of their exercise, you may be prepared to exhibit them in your deportment, as they were exhibited in his. Read often and attentively the narrative of his life, in which they are not merely described as having belonged to him, but represented as actually displayed by him, and accompanied with all the circumstances which render them at once more interesting and more instructive. Think of his condescension and humility—think of his matchless compassion to men—think of his devotedness to the glory and the will of his heavenly Father—think of his unconquerable zeal in prosecuting the arduous and painful work which had been assigned to him—think of his meekness under unmerited wrongs and bitter provocations—think of his patience, and magnanimity, and perseverance, amidst unparalleled sufferings; bring all these things before the eye of your mind; muse upon them deeply and affectionately; let your hearts kindle into admiration as you realize them in all

their worth and splendour ; and, yielding to their attractive or their commanding power, be persuaded to “go and do likewise.” You will often find yourselves in situations different from those in which Christ was ever placed, and exposed to temptations by which he was never assailed ; the moral depravity which attaches to your nature must affect all your doings in a manner which he, whose nature was perfectly incorrupt, could never experience ; there were duties belonging to the office that he sustained which you never can be called on to perform ; and there are obligations connected with your relations and conditions in the world which could have no place in his. But you cannot take a close and spiritual view of his actions, as they are detailed by the Evangelists, without perceiving the principles on which he uniformly proceeded, and the motives by which he was constantly influenced ; and regarding these as the more essential parts of his example, it must be your paramount object to have them firmly established and continually operating in your minds, so that you may be ever denying yourselves to sin and ever practising righteousness, and amidst all the variety which your conduct will exhibit in reference to the conduct of Christ, it will be plainly perceived that you have imbibed his spirit and are following in his steps.

And imagine not that in striving to be like Christ in moral purity, you are engaged in aiming at an impracticable attainment. In yourselves, indeed, you are inadequate to it. But through Christ strengthening you, you can do this, and you can do all things. You "have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of your infirmities ;" you have an High Priest who "was in all points tempted like as you are," and who therefore knows your weaknesses, and your difficulties, and your dangers, and in whose warmest sympathies you have a sure and unfailing refuge. And what is more, he is "without sin : " he triumphed over the temptations which assailed him ; and in consequence of this he both knows how to give you the same victory, and is invested with power to bestow it. Place your trust, therefore, in his compassion and in his might, and you shall not be confounded or put to shame. "Come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Having his ever present and all sufficient aid, you shall be able to resist equally the allurements and the terrors by which your spiritual enemies would seduce you from the ways of righteousness. You shall "keep yourselves unspotted from the world," and increase in "the beauties of holiness," even in this polluted land. And at length being "sanctified wholly in soul, and body, and spirit,"

you shall inhabit that blessed region where no tempter solicits, where no sin is committed, where you shall be satisfied with the likeness of your Saviour, and where you shall sing the song of everlasting praise, "to him who loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood, and made you kings and priests unto God."

SERMON XVII.

OBLIGATIONS TO OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN PASSEVER.

ACTS XVIII. 21.

I must by all means keep this feast that cometh.

THE feast to which the Apostle here refers was the Jewish Passover. It was about to be celebrated. And he was anxious to be present—not merely to be a spectator, but to be a partaker, of the solemnity. Nor was it a common degree of anxiety that he felt and expressed on this occasion. His language intimates a sense of strong and indispensable obligation; and so do the circumstances in which he uttered it. Ephesus presented to him a field of usefulness, which he might have been supposed desirous to improve, and not easily prevailed upon to abandon. His reasoning with the Jews whom he met with in the synagogue of that place, had been so far successful that they wished to be indulged with hearing more of it. With that view they entreated him to prolong his resi-

dence among them. And to persons thus disposed he had every prospect of being serviceable as an Apostle of Jesus of Nazareth. In spite, however, of such a favourable and inviting opportunity of carrying on his ministerial work in that place, he refused to stay, and he resolved to go to Jerusalem, and declared his resolution in these emphatic terms—"I must by all means keep this feast."

And what rendered the step which he took so decidedly the more extraordinary, he was not bound to observe the passover. The kingdom of God had now come. The dispensation of the Gospel was fully revealed. He was one of those who were specially appointed to proclaim it. And no longer "under the law but under grace," he was exempt, in common with all the followers of Christ, from the whole of that yoke of ceremonies which it was his duty to bear, and to which he had actually submitted, till he embraced the doctrine of the cross. Nay, there was an apparent impropriety in conforming to a system whose peculiarities had been avowedly and authoritatively abrogated, according to his own doctrine, because it not only exhibited what would probably be condemned as inconsistent, but might have a tendency to confirm those who witnessed it in their attachment to the institutions of Moses. But, notwithstanding all this, Paul was fixed in his determination to engage in the approaching

passover. "I must," said he, "by all means, keep this feast that cometh, in Jerusalem."

Now, in what way are we to account for the apostle's conduct? In the *first* place, his zeal in the Christian cause was so ardent, that it led him to place himself in those situations, and to adopt those measures by which that cause might be most effectually and extensively promoted. And in the instance before us this consideration could not fail to influence his mind and purpose. For although there was an opening for his labours at Ephesus, which promised no inconsiderable success, yet there was a far more important opening at Jerusalem, of which it was in his power to take advantage, and from his improvement of which he might rationally anticipate the happiest results. At the feast of the passover there would be an immense multitude of people assembled. These people would be engaged in an ordinance which naturally suggested those great and interesting truths which it was Paul's object to preach and disseminate. And having come from all quarters of the country, they were likely, when they returned to their homes, to circulate that information, and to diffuse those impressions respecting Christianity, which they had received from the ministrations of our apostle, and thus to produce an effect in its favour far more extensively than any operations among a less numerous and more stationary population

could possibly have accomplished. This explains the eagerness of the apostle to go to Jerusalem.

And then, in the *second* place, his resolution to “keep the feast” is to be traced to the same general principle—a principle of sacred and devoted regard to the religion of Jesus. To advance its interests in the world, he was ready to make every sacrifice that did not violate a good conscience. And hence it was that he condescended to the humours and prejudices of his countrymen; and either personally observed, or gave his open sanction to rites which were no longer binding on the church of God. “I am made all things to all men,” said he, “that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel’s sake. Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews.” Accordingly, in the case before us, he kept the feast of the passover, after he had become a minister of the cross; because his doing so tended to remove the jealousies, and to conciliate the favour, of those whom he was labouring to convert, and gave him an access to their understandings and their affections, which would otherwise have been completely shut against all his labours. It was lawful for him to neglect the passover; but with the views that he entertained, and in the station which he occupied, it was not expedient. And as his engaging in it multiplied his means of usefulness, so it implied no-

thing that was sinful, or disrespectful to the authority of the master whom he served,—the pass-over being mainly a commemoration of a national deliverance, and never having been abolished by any express or formal prohibition from Him who had appointed it.

Such was the conduct of the apostle, and such probably were the reasons by which it was governed. And what a contrast does it afford to the conduct of many who yet profess to have the same faith and the same hope which animated Paul ! If they do not look on the ordinances of the Gospel with total indifference or absolute dislike, they at least manifest no great attachment for them. They can scarcely be prevailed on to engage in them, if it shall cost them much trouble, or subject them to any inconvenience. They will deliberately forsake them when tempted by worldly advantage, or by worldly pleasure. And as for any thing like the zeal or the eagerness which Paul displayed on the occasion here alluded to, it is with them entirely out of the question, although there was not a single motive which actuated him, to whose influence they also should not submissively yield. Far from observing institutions for which there is no positive commandment, they do not even show any fidelity or any earnestness in the observance of those which are sanctioned by the divine ap-

pointment. And from the most solemn and interesting of them all—our *Christian Passover*, they scruple not to absent themselves for no reason, or for a very slight one ; or they celebrate it in such a cold, formal, slovenly way, as plainly to show that it possesses no importance in their regard, and has taken no hold of their affections.

To such of you as this description applies to, I must be permitted to say, that your spiritual condition is any thing but prosperous or safe. I know that the ordinances of religion are considered as non-essentials—as matters of form—as things which may be overlooked and forsaken without incurring much guilt—as mere circumstantials which do not enter into the substance of Christianity, and the utter neglect of which, though it may make the character less showy, does not render it less estimable or less worthy. I know that such sentiments prevail respecting the ordinances of religion. But I know also that such sentiments are wholly unfounded in truth—equally repugnant to reason and to Scripture—contradictory to the experience of all the most eminent of the saints of God—and ruinous to those who entertain and act upon them. The ordinances of religion are not of that frivolous nature, or of that doubtful authority, which some suppose. They constitute a part of the dispensation of grace under which you are placed, and

through which you hope to be saved. They are instituted by the wisdom, and enforced by the command, of the great Head of the church. And consequently the spirit which leads you to despise them, leads you also to despise every other branch of the Christian system, which may not happen to square with your opinions and your wishes. I would, therefore, warn you against the contempt with which you treat the ordinances of religion, not only on account of the intrinsic importance or beneficial tendency of these ordinances themselves, but also, and chiefly, on account of their intimate connection with the Gospel at large. It is quite impossible for you on any rational or tenable ground whatever, to separate the one from the other. You have no right to do so. And you cannot do so, without setting up your own judgment or inclinations in opposition to the divine will, and consequently forfeiting all interest in the blessings of the new covenant.

But foregoing at present the discussion of the general subject, I would direct your attention to that particular ordinance, the Christian passover, which in the course of Providence we are so often called to celebrate, and shortly state the reasons why we ought, "by all means to keep this feast that cometh."

I. And in the *first* place, let us consider our

obligation to partake of the Lord's Supper, as it respects Christ.

Christ is our Lord and King, whom we are bound and whom we profess to obey. His supremacy over us is divine. We acknowledge it. And of course it is both undutiful and inconsistent to resist any injunction that he may be pleased to lay upon us. No matter what the injunction is—or what our idea may be of its reasonableness, its importance, its tendency—or how it may affect our interests, or thwart our propensities. It is enough for us to know, that such an injunction has been issued by him who has a sovereign title to our submission. And if knowing this, we refuse submission, what does our refusal amount to but a renunciation of our allegiance to the “King of kings and Lord of lords?” It is just saying by our conduct, that we will not have Christ to rule over us.

Now, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of Christ. He has seen proper to institute this feast, and to require our observance of it. It has not merely obtained his approbation. He does not rest satisfied with recommending it to our attention. He has not simply appointed it, and then left it to our own discretion to partake of it or not, as we may deem proper. Even in this case it would have been nothing more than respectful and becoming to acquiesce in the proposal, and to lose sight of every other consider-

ation in our desire to please its author. But we are not left to our own discretion. The course that we are to pursue is plainly and unequivocally described. "*Do this,*" said Christ, "in remembrance of me." So that it stands upon a footing with all the other precepts which are contained in his word ; and it is just as criminal and dangerous to disobey the former, as to disobey the latter. Men may set up a distinction between the two, but it has no foundation in sound principle ; it is invented solely for the purpose of soothing their conscience, or excusing their perverseness ; and neither it, nor any thing else, can disguise the truth, that by neglecting the Lord's supper, they are resisting the authority and trampling on the statute of the Son of God.

But while it is thus clear and indisputable that we ought to keep this feast from a conviction of duty to our spiritual King, this conviction of duty should require additional force and influence from the claims of gratitude. Christ, who requires us to do this in remembrance of him, is our Saviour as well as our King. The two characters are closely associated in his person. His real authority is founded on his redeeming work. Whatever he commands, therefore, comes enforced by all the grace which he has displayed in our salvation. If that grace has kindled in our hearts the flame of reciprocal affection, it will secure through the medium of this affection,

obedience to his authority ; for he himself has said, “ if you love me, keep my commandments.” And while this holds with respect to every part of his law, it holds in a more particular manner with respect to that part of it which enjoins the observance of the Lord’s supper. For in this solemnity we are called to commemorate that love of his which many waters could not quench, and which the floods could not drown—a love that was stronger than death—a love that passeth knowledge. And whether we consider that love as to the perfect purity and disinterestedness which characterize it, or as to the relation in which we stood as rebels to him by whom it was manifested, or as to the extent and magnitude of those benefits which it prompted him to bestow, or as to the method which it adopted for securing these, so that we might enjoy them in adequate abundance,—we feel it impossible to estimate its height or its depth, or to calculate the returns which are due by us who have been its unworthy but honoured objects. So that to withhold ourselves from the ordinance which celebrates it, is not only to show a disregard of the highest authority, but also an insensibility to the richest mercy ; and to contract the double guilt of disobeying him in whom both of these attributes are so gloriously united, and who, while he ordains us to do this, sends home the injunction by appealing to the best affections of our

hearts, when he ordains us to do it in remembrance of him shedding his blood upon a cross for the remission of our sins.

There is another circumstance which deserves attention, as strengthening our obligation to keep this feast in reference to Christ. A public avowal of our faith in him, according to his own declaration, enters essentially into the character of his true disciples. Nobody, indeed, can possess this principle in its genuine spirit and extent, without feeling himself determined to declare it by word and in deed. It rests upon so exalted an object—it realizes such great and glorious privileges—it is so rational and influential in its nature, and so decided in its views and operations—it awakens such ardent affections towards him on whom it is fixed, and creates such feelings of gratitude and peace and joy, that it cannot remain dormant in the breast; it scorns concealment; it breaks through the restraints of fear; and constrains those whom it actuates, not merely to acknowledge but to glory in Christ as their Saviour and their Lord. And if any thing were wanting to produce this effect, they find it in the language of Christ himself, who promises the highest recompense to them that “confess him before men,” and denounces vengeance against all who deny or are ashamed of him in a present world.

Now we cannot imagine a more appropriate

opportunity of thus professing our faith in Jesus than what is afforded by the service of a communion table. It has always been contemplated in that light, and has been always resorted to for that purpose, by the real followers of the Lamb ; and it is so obvious and so emphatic a mode of proclaiming our belief, that one can hardly see how the believer should in any case bring himself to omit it. By itself, indeed, it signifies nothing ; and if contradicted by our behaviour in other respects, then instead of being an expression of faith in the Redeemer, it is only a piece of affectation and hypocrisy. But still while other things are absolutely necessary, this also is so indispensable, that where it is wanting, the character is left incomplete ; we exhibit a marked inconsistency ; we betray a strong symptom of our being destitute of that principle, “without which it is impossible to please God.” It is true also, that we ought not to confine our profession of faith in Christ to any particular times, or to any particular occasions ; it should be embodied into the whole of our deportment. But it is also true that there are times and occasions when it is more especially becoming, and more peremptorily called for. And one of these unquestionably is the Lord’s Supper. For in that ordinance we do not simply say that we believe in Christ as a divine messenger, but we say, in a most significant and solemn manner,

that we believe in him as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” We intimate our acceptance of him and our reliance upon him as an atoning sacrifice. And thus testifying our homage to the merit of his cross, we openly acknowledge him in that character which is at once the most offensive to the carnal mind, and the most interesting and important to sinful creatures, of all the characters which he has assumed and sustained as our Redeemer.

A respect for the honour of Christ also requires us, “by all means to keep this feast.” His honour is concerned in every thing by which he is held out to the church and to the world, as well as in the treatment that is given to him by those who profess to be his friends. And it can scarcely be concerned in any thing more than it is in that ordinance, which presents him in all the grace and glory of his saving character. It is very true, we commemorate him at his table as in a state of the deepest humiliation. We there remember him as “smitten, stricken of God and afflicted.” There we call the attention of others to him as suffering the ignominious death of the cross. And to the carnal eye, and at the first view, this may seem to be exposing him to contumely and scorn, instead of securing for him homage and admiration. But we must not forget, that even amidst the deep abasement of his crucifixion, there dwelt in him all the fulness

of the Godhead, and that though thus manifested in the likeness of sinful flesh, and in the reality of suffering flesh, he was achieving a work of infinite and everlasting moment—that while apparently passive, helpless, and subdued, he was fighting our battles and conquering our foes—that he was by the very means which sink him in the estimation of mere human wisdom, asserting for himself the prerogative of being “the power of God and the wisdom of God, for salvation to every one that believeth”—and that he was earning, by the grandest and most meritorious achievement, a title to those praises which shall be sung to him by the redeemed throughout eternity. And of all the honours that can be paid to him, that will be dearest and most acceptable in his regard, and most richly due by us, for whom he bore the shame and accomplished the decease of Calvary, which consists in recognising and glorying in him, as he is represented by his own appointment in the ordinance of communion; and this public testimony to the high distinction which he won for himself when suspended on the accursed tree, will not be the less becoming in us, nor the less precious and grateful to him, that it is given in spite of the ridicule of ungodliness and unbelief, and given by partaking of an institution which is as simple in its forms and mode of observance, as the blessings which it signifies or conveys, are great and splendid, and as

He whom it commemorates is worthy of all reverence and of all praise.

These few observations may serve to satisfy us, that our obligation to partake of the Lord's Supper, is, in reference to Christ, of the strongest and most perfect kind. Submission to his authority—gratitude for his mercy—the workings of a genuine faith in him—and regard for his glory—all conspire to impose it upon us. And under the influence of these considerations, it becomes us to form our resolution, and to say with the apostle, "We must by all means keep this feast that cometh."

II. In the *second* place, there is our obligation to partake of the Lord's Supper, as it respects ourselves.

We have all a great work given us of God to do—the work of preparation for eternity. Redemption has been purchased for us by the obedience and death of Christ. But in order that we may finally enjoy it, it is requisite that we have a certain character. This character is prescribed to us in the word of God. And while it is there set before us in ample detail, and enjoined upon us by express command, we are assured that, possessing it, we shall enter into life, but that, without it, we shall not see life, and must still bear the burden of God's wrath.

Now, if this statement has made its just im-

pression on our minds, we will be anxious to acquire the character which, according to the very nature of the case, and according to the divine appointment, is necessary to qualify us for eternal salvation. Having acquired its leading principles and features, we will be desirous to have it confirmed, and matured, and perfected. We will use all diligence in cultivating it, that there may be no room to doubt of its reality or of its meetness. For this purpose we will put forth our best energies and employ our best endeavours. And knowing well that, as the happiness of heaven cannot be reached without the Christian character, so the Christian character is not to be formed and maintained without the application of certain means, we will be careful to bring these means into active and constant operation. Even those things which are not specifically prescribed, if they promise to be of advantage to us in our spiritual work, will obtain a due portion of our regard. And much more will we devote our attention to those things which, while they have a native tendency to improve us, come recommended by the wisdom, and enforced by the sanction, of the great Head of the church.

Well then ; is it possible for us to be sensible of this and to act agreeably to it, and yet to exclude from our practical regard the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ? Is not that ordinance of divine institution ? Is it not one evident object of

its appointment to purify, and support, and console, and encourage us as those who are looking forward to immortality? And is it not in its own nature, and is it not proved by experience to be powerfully calculated to produce these effects, and to confer these benefits? What is better fitted to strengthen and enliven our faith in Jesus, than the impressive representation which it sets before us of his willingness and his ability to save us to the very uttermost? What is better fitted to increase that love which we feel to our God and Saviour, than the affecting view which it gives us of the divine compassion to our guilty and perishing souls? What is better fitted to cherish our benevolent affections towards our fellow creatures, than the proof which it furnishes of God's pitying the unthankful and the unholy, and of Christ's dying even for his enemies? What is better fitted to nourish in us a hatred of sin, than the awful demonstration which it holds up of the malignant nature and the ruinous consequences of sin, in the sufferings and death of our surety? What is better fitted to make us love and practise holiness, than those motives to obedience which it brings to our remembrance, and presses upon our hearts, by all that it shows forth of the Saviour's grace, and of the nature and purpose of his sacrifice? What is better fitted to comfort us under the convictions of guilt and the fears of God's anger, than the demonstra-

tion which it affords of his tender mercy, and of the efficacy of those means by which pardon and reconciliation are secured? What is better fitted to uphold and cheer us amidst our inward corruptions, our spiritual inability, our manifold dangers and temptations, than the assurance which it so continually gives of the completeness of that work which Christ accomplished in our behalf, when he died according to the Scriptures and the will of God, and the promises which it implies, that he will never leave us nor forsake us, but that having conducted us in safety through our earthly pilgrimage, he will at last “present us faultless before the presence of his Father’s glory with exceeding joy?” What is better fitted to solace our hearts when they are grieved with the crosses, and disappointments, and afflictions which chequer our temporal lot, than the belief which it confirms and enlivens, that Christ who suffered so meritoriously, is now triumphantly exalted to the throne of universal government, that all which concerns or can affect us is at his disposal, that while he is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” and our distresses, he is able as well as willing to sustain us under their pressure, and that having died for our salvation, he will make every thing which befalls us, be it as grievous for the present as it may, contribute to our eternal well being? And what is better fitted to invigo-

rate our hopes, to support us under trial, to animate us in duty, than the promise which it so distinctly presents to us of the final advent of our Lord, who as he was "once offered to bear our sins," will come "the second time, without sin unto salvation?" What, I say, is better fitted to promote all these important objects than the ordinance of communion? And is it not therefore just to conclude, that those who wilfully and habitually neglect it, are deliberately marring their personal improvement in all those graces by which it is most essential for them to be distinguished? Nay, must not we go farther, and conclude that the religion of Jesus has not yet taken possession of their minds—that being thus careless of the means by which they are to be qualified for heaven, heaven surely is not the object of their ambition—that at any rate, refusing to do what is conducive or necessary to the advancement of the Christian character, they can never possibly attain the Christian's reward?

It is granted that there are many who sit down at the Lord's table and partake of the ordinance, without deriving any practical advantage from it. We do not say that it affords any absolute security for the improvement of those who engage in it. The contrary meets our observation every day. But, in like manner, we are perpetually seeing proofs of the same thing as to *all* the means of grace; and even as to the Gospel it-

self. But it would be very absurd to say, that the light of the Gospel is not calculated to be useful in guiding us in the ways of righteousness and peace, because there are thousands who still choose to walk in darkness, and to live like heathens, in a Christian land. In order to produce its proper effects, the Gospel must be cordially received and faithfully applied. And so it is with respect to the Lord's Supper. That ordinance, for the purpose of its being useful in the way that we have mentioned, must be observed in a suitable manner. If men are indifferent whether they partake of it or not—if, when engaging in it, they treat it as a mere matter of form and ceremony—if they are to make it an instrument for securing worldly reputation or secular gain—if they propose to substitute it in the room of Christ's atoning blood, and to make use of it as a passport to forgiveness and peace—if they make no inquiry into their personal meetness for it, and give no heed to the preparation which its sacredness requires—if they mingle in its service thoughtlessly or inadvertently, as if the redeemer were not present with them, and did not witness them, and would not judge them—if they do not enter into its spiritual meaning, and do not surrender themselves to its holy influence, or if they go away from it heedless of what they have been doing, and forgetful of the obligations which it has laid upon them—if it be in this way

that they deal with the Christian passover,—so far from its being profitable to them, it has only been an occasion of adding to their guilt, and it can only harden them in their sinful and destructive course. But still whether we look to its own nature, or to the character of its author, or to the experience of its worthy participators, we shall find that if used rightly it must operate profitably. Its decided tendency no less than its ultimate design is to purify the heart and life of the devout communicant, and to impart to him consolation and encouragement in his Christian journey. And since this is its tendency, and since its tendency will be made effectual in the case of every one who sincerely embarks in it, and piously depends upon the blessing of the Spirit, those cannot be in earnest about their preparation for a future state who do not make conscience of going to the Lord's table; and all of us who have a serious and enlightened regard to our spiritual interests, and would do what will contribute to secure, and to advance them, will rejoice in every return of our Christian passover, and say with the apostle in my text, "We must by all means keep this feast that cometh."

We should now proceed to consider our obligation to partake of the Lord's Supper as it respects the interests of Christianity in the world. But that we shall reserve as the subject of another discourse. In the mean time, we conclude

with a word or two in application of what has been said.

Supposing you to be convinced by what we have now stated, or by what has previously occurred to your own mind, that you are bound in point of duty to keep this feast, you must not flatter yourselves that such a conviction will alone justify you in coming forward to the Lord's table. The observance of this ordinance is a privilege as well as a duty. And you being admitted to the enjoyment of a privilege presupposes that you are qualified for it. Before, then, you come forward to partake of it, you must inquire whether you have the qualifications. If your conscience tell you that you have them not, then I do not simply say to you, abstain from what would be a profanation of that which God has hallowed. You may be apt to rest contented with such abstinence; but that is a grievous mistake. Your discovery of a want of fitness for the communion service is also a discovery of your want of fitness for the kingdom of heaven. And it is an awful delusion to continue in such a state, satisfied to be excluded at once from Christian privileges here, and from eternal glory hereafter. Having ascertained your lost condition, make no delay in seeking for the salvation of the Gospel. Apply to the Saviour, from your ignorance or from your disbelief of whom your disregard of this feast has hitherto proceeded. Ap-

ply to him for the blessings that you need. Apply with earnestness. Apply in the appointed way. And he will receive you graciously, and love you freely; and by the influences of his Spirit he will dispose and qualify you to sit down at his table upon earth, and finally bring you to his presence in heaven.

I trust that such of you as have already, from faith in Christ, and love to him, and respect to his authority and honour, and a desire to promote your own highest interests, formed the resolution to keep this feast, may be encouraged to carry it into effect by the considerations that have been set before you. And I cherish the hope that while you give all diligence to have on the wedding garment,—to be clothed in the Redeemer's righteousness, and adorned with the graces of the Spirit, the God of ordinances will hear your prayers for his guidance and blessing—that he will bring you to his banqueting house—that his banner over you will be love—and that, in your personal experience, you shall find it to be a good thing for you to draw near to your Saviour and your God, in the ordinance of communion.

SERMON XVIII.

OBLIGATIONS TO OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER.

ACTS XVIII. 21.

I must by all means keep this feast that cometh.

THIS declaration of the Apostle Paul, as we formerly stated, refers to the Jewish passover : And along with the circumstances in which it was uttered, intimates most emphatically the weight of obligation under which he felt himself to observe that great solemnity. As it formed a part of the Mosaic institutions, and had no place in the church of Christ, of which he was a member and a minister, the Apostle was not bound to observe it. But still the observance of it was lawful ; and situated as he was, it afforded him the means and the opportunity of promoting that cause which lay nearest his heart, to a much wider extent than he could otherwise have done it. On this account he formed and executed the purpose so strongly expressed in the words of my text. And if from this consid-

eration *he* was so eager to keep the *Jewish* passover, how much more incumbent is it on *us* to keep our *Christian* passover ! It was in this way that we proposed to apply the subject : We proposed to consider the obligations to partake of the Lord's Supper,—*first*, as it respects Christ ; *secondly*, as it respects ourselves ; and *thirdly*, as it respects the interests of Christianity in the world. The first and second of these particulars we have already endeavoured to illustrate ; and we shall now proceed to discuss the remaining one.

III. We observe then, in the *third* place, that we ought by all means to keep this feast that cometh, from a regard to the interests of Christianity in the world.

The preservation and prosperity of the Gospel must at all times be an object of the very deepest concern to real Christians. Every aspect in which it can possibly be viewed goes directly to awaken our anxiety, and to prompt our endeavours, for its continuance and its progress. Believing, as we profess to do, that it has come from God, we cannot, consistently with that belief, be in any degree indifferent to its success. Even without having any particular knowledge of its tendency, its value, or its necessity, the very circumstance of its Divine original should make us not only respect and acquiesce in it our-

selves, but also feel desirous to secure for it, the respect and acquiescence of others. This is dictated by all that we owe to the wisdom and authority of him who has revealed it. But when we look to its intrinsic nature, and to its ultimate purpose—when we contemplate the demonstration which it affords of the character and the government of the Supreme Being—when we see it glowing with the warmest affection, teeming with the richest benevolence to our fallen race—when we recollect how essential it is to the temporal comfort, and above all, to the everlasting salvation of man—then must we be urged on to the most strenuous exertions for maintaining and propagating it, by every feeling of compassion towards our fellow-men, and by every feeling of devotedness to the glory of God. Indeed, though it be not a conclusive proof of our having experienced the power of religion in our own hearts, it is at least indispensable to the completeness of that proof—it is indispensable for showing decisively that we have obtained enlightened views of the doctrine, and really imbibed the spirit, and become sensible of the paramount importance of the Gospel of Christ—it is indispensable, I say, for showing this, that we be zealous and active in defending it against the assaults of its adversaries, and in recommending it to the belief and obedience of our brethren.

Now one method of accomplishing this is our

faithful and devout observance of the Lord's Supper. There are various other methods more or less calculated to produce the same effect, and all of them it is our duty to employ so far as circumstances may warrant or require us thus to act; but of the one more immediately under discussion, we are entitled to say that it admits of no doubt as to its propriety and obligation. For while it is characterized by simplicity, and within the reach of every disciple of the Saviour, however poor and however humble, it is at the same time expressly appointed by our Lord, and enforced upon us by all the tenderness of a dying commandment. And our motives for having recourse to it as a means of upholding Christianity are completed, when we consider how admirably it is fitted to attain that end.

The general tendency of such institutions to uphold the system which they are attached to, has been universally acknowledged. And if we needed such support, we might have recourse to the opinions and the practice of men of the world. They have their commemoration of eminent individuals—not merely for showing respect to the memory of the departed, but for perpetuating the recollection of their measures and the influence of their principles. And, alas! in thus endeavouring to immortalize men even of doubtful character, and to preserve the authority of opinions and systems which might have been safely

allowed to pass into oblivion, they have too often shown a punctuality and a zeal which they never exhibit in their regards to an ordinance which carries our thoughts back to the Saviour of a world, and which holds forth the doctrine of eternal life. But being wise in their generation, we have at least some advantage from them to our argument, when we maintain the expediency and the wisdom of such an ordinance as the Supper for promoting the welfare of the Christian faith, amidst that forgetfulness of it, that unconcern about it, that actual hostility against it, with which it has perpetually to struggle.

But we have better authority than that of man for taking this view of the subject. That divine person who instituted the Supper, not only instituted it that it might keep up the remembrance of him in the minds of those who were actually to partake of it—but also to keep up the remembrance of him in the world around him. He said, “Do this,” that is, eat bread and drink wine as symbols of my sacrifice, visible to all who witness the rite—“in remembrance of me.” And, accordingly, after his inspired apostle has given to us what he received of the Lord respecting the ordinance in question, he adds, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do *show* the Lord’s death till he come;”—Ye *show* the Lord’s death—that is, ye *proclaim* or *preach* it, in order that others may be instructed,

as well as that you may discharge your own duty, and consult your own advantage.

Let us attend then to the manner in which our observance of this feast tends to promote the interests of Christianity.

In prosecuting this view, I observe, in the *first* place, that it bears our personal testimony to the truth of Christianity.

When we sit down at the Lord's table, it is naturally presupposed that we believe in him. It is possible that we may be acting insincerely and hypocritically, but that is the ostensible meaning of our communicating. And while there are many of whom it cannot be doubted for a moment that their whole heart is in the service, it is obvious with regard to many others of whom that cannot be affirmed, that their understanding at least has been so far consulted, and that though they have not got an experimental and saving knowledge of Christ, they have a speculative conviction of his divine mission, and such a firm conviction as to make them openly engage in an ordinance which is an object of scorn to unbelieving and ungodly men.

There may be some with whom our opinion of the Gospel, and our attestation to it, will have little weight—who will disclaim all idea of being influenced by what we think and do in such matters—and upon whom our conduct will have no other effect than that of exciting ridicule or

contempt. Though even with regard to not a few of these it may be rationally expected, that they shall not be able wholly to resist the impression which our commemoration of Christ is fitted to make upon those who witness it, and that in spite of all their prejudices and of all their hostility, it will leave a feeling of suspicion at least, that the system which they have hitherto rejected, but to which we thus bear our solemn, united, and continued witness, is not altogether unworthy of their regard. And this is a "day of small things" which is not to be despised, because it may gradually and insensibly lead to the most important results.

But independently of these, there are many to whom our observance of the Lord's Supper will be a forcible and successful appeal in behalf of Christianity. They cannot, consistently with their ordinary habits of judging, refuse to be guided, in some measure, by the respect which we pay to it so publicly, and so explicitly. They would violate a law by which they are governed to a certain degree in all other cases, if they did not draw a conclusion in favour of that which they see occupying such a place in the belief and system of a great number of their fellow-men whom they know to be well acquainted with it, to be competent for deciding upon its merits, and to be as much concerned as they themselves are in disregarding it, if it were really false or

pernicious. They feel, whether they acknowledge it or not, that there must be something of truth and something of moment in the plan of revelation, since it has gained such an ascendancy over our minds, as that, in obedience to the injunction of its author, we come forward voluntarily, deliberately, and unequivocally to declare, that we consider his claims to universal homage fully established, and have not one remaining doubt that he is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. And when they are made to feel this, we have obtained no inconsiderable advantage. Not only have we maintained the ground of which we were previously possessed, but we have made a positive advance into the territory which we are desirous to win. We have got so far into the esteem of those who have been heretofore living, and who but for this might have continued to live, in enmity or indifference. And thus a way is opened through which, by the blessing of God, we may go on to conquer the whole man, and to bring it into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

In the statement now made, it is by no means intended to be held, or even insinuated, that any individual should become a Christian, merely because others are Christians. But we certainly do affirm, that our profession of Christianity at the Lord's table may exercise a legitimate influence, as it will exercise an actual influence, on those who hap-

pen to witness it, so as to make them value Christianity more highly, and think of it more correctly and more respectfully. And when we say that this influence goes not only to predispose them to the Gospel, and to prepare them for the more direct arguments by which we endeavour to secure their belief, but also to confirm and encourage their belief after it has been established, we say what is true in point of fact, and sound in point of principle. We are only urging a species of presumptive evidence that is perfectly agreeable to the rational and moral nature with which our Maker has endowed us, and that never fails to affect in a greater or less degree according to circumstances, and in all departments of practical knowledge, the decisions of the most independent mind.

A great deal of the effect, doubtless, must depend in the estimation in which we are held by those who are supposed to be influenced by what we do. If, on the one hand, we are personally the objects of their dislike, or their contempt, or their distrust, little or no good is to be anticipated. But, on the other hand, if they look on us with reverence, with affection, with confidence, then it is to be expected that the impression will be powerful, and that they will be conscious of a strong prepossession in favour of Christianity, even though they may not be able to state one other specific ground for the sentiments which

they entertain. In general their sentiments will be proportioned to the opinions they have formed of the extent of our knowledge, the strength of our understanding, the uprightness of our intentions, the integrity of our character, and the degree in which our deportment corresponds with our profession. Every one of these qualities has its separate weight, and will separately tell upon the mind according to the devotion which it is accustomed to pay to intellectual gifts and to moral virtues. But when they are seen united in many individuals, or in the great body of those who agree to testify their belief in the Gospel at a communion table, it is impossible that the prejudice against it entertained by the persons we refer to, should not be greatly abated, that their judgment should not be strongly biassed in its favour, and that every feeling of attachment to it which has already been engendered in their hearts should not be ripened into far more liveliness and far more decision.

And while we may hope for this result in the world at large, and may rest satisfied that it takes place there though we have not always the means of tracing and ascertaining it, we will see it more distinctly among those with whom we are intimately associated. Every man has a certain sphere in which he more immediately moves, and in which his influence is more particularly felt; and it is there, whether it be in his domestic esta-

blishment, or whether it be in the circle of his friends, or whether it be in the wider intercourse of social life, or whether it be within the compass of a still more extended neighbourhood,—it is there that the deference or the esteem with which he is regarded, is to operate most effectually in obtaining for the religion which he openly professes in the ordinance of the Supper, all the acquiescence and submission that such means are capable of securing. And as there is no Christian, however humble and obscure he may be, whose testimony to the truth of the Gospel may not be attended with some measure of effect on the faith and opinions of others, so it becomes every Christian to bear this testimony in that public and impressive manner in which it is given at the table of the Lord.

2. In the *second* place, our observance of the Lord's Supper tends to promote the interests of Christianity, by drawing the attention of others to it, and leading them to inquire into its merits.

One great reason why Christianity makes so little progress, and produces such a slight impression, is the want of attention on the part of those to whom it is addressed. They are so indolent, so engrossed with worldly pursuits, or so callous to the ordinary causes of excitement in spiritual concerns, that they do not give themselves to the consideration of it, and are as unmoved by it as

if it had no existence. They do not know it, and they do not care or strive to know it; they are unacquainted with its nature—they are ignorant of its paramount claims on their regard, because they are so occupied with other things that its still small voice cannot penetrate so far as to awaken their sensibilities, and constrain them to give it a serious and impartial hearing. It requires something of a peculiar and extraordinary cast—something of singular interest and of comparatively rare occurrence, to attract their notice and to render it the subject of their examination. And this something is to be found in our observance of the Christian passover.

All the ordinances of religion, indeed, partake more or less of this tendency; and in that point of view are productive of great benefit to the cause. But they fall short of the ordinance we are speaking of, inasmuch as they are of a more retired character—less significant in their forms and circumstances—not so apt to strike the imagination and excite curiosity—and from the frequency with which they are engaged in, indented with the every day events and every day conduct of life. In these respects and on these accounts, they are not so likely to arrest attention and provoke inquiry among those who are yet strangers to the Gospel. And even though our piety and virtue may be regarded as most power-

ful proofs of the divine origin of our faith, and when carried to their highest pitch of excellence, are admirably calculated to render that faith the object of veneration, yet still the moral excellence which we thus exhibit is generally so unobtrusive, and has so little obvious or declared connection with the system by which it is really generated, and mingles so habitually with the common course and current of human action, that notwithstanding the momentary admiration with which it is beheld, or the unfeigned praise which it may receive, it does not naturally and directly lead men to investigate the source from which it all proceeds.

But the case is very different with respect to the Lord's Supper. Our observance of that solemnity has all the properties in a remarkable degree, of which we have found the other things alluded to, but partially possessed. When men see us at certain distant intervals of time stepping aside from the usual routine of religious duty—when they observe us on those occasions, though of different families, and perhaps strangers to one another, assembling in one body, and sitting down at one sacred Table—when they behold us, by the use of symbols equally simple and expressive, commemorating Him whom we regard as the author and finisher of our faith—when they thus contemplate us vowing allegiance to Christ, and as it were renouncing every thing that

we may obtain the salvation which we profess to seek for, and holding our feast upon that sacrifice of himself on whose efficacy we avow our unreserved reliance—there is in all this what may well awaken a lively interest in their mind, and prompt them to inquire into the nature and character and evidence of that scheme of belief and of practice, of which it is a standing institution. And whenever we have prevailed upon men by this or any other means, to direct their serious thoughts to the Gospel—whenever we have succeeded in getting them inclined to examine it—whenever we have tempted them to ask in good earnest about the grounds of its pretensions and the nature of its principles—we have advanced a most important step towards bringing them over to the cordial and practical acceptance of it, and we have at least induced them to pause in their career of opposition till they shall have patiently investigated the truth of that religion which in the memorial of the Supper, and by our participation of it, they are so affectingly called upon to mark and consider. Instances of this happy result have repeatedly occurred. We doubt not that there are many which have escaped observation, and are known only in the conscious and blessed change effected in the hearts of those to whom they have happened. And we do not go too far when we say that the Lord's Supper is one grand instrument by which the youthful part of

our population are frequently prevented from becoming indifferent to the Gospel, or from going into the ranks of infidelity. It arrests their attention in early life; they insensibly attach importance to that which it represents to them in such an interesting light; they grow up in the expectation of one day joining us in commemorating him whom it holds out as the Saviour, and for whom it has taught them to cherish the sentiments of reverence and gratitude; and at length having sought for and acquired such information respecting his character, his work, and his salvation, as to make him the object of their believing regards, they come forward to profess their own faith, and thus to be auxiliaries in the struggle which all the true disciples of Christ are making for promoting the prosperity of his religion in the world.

3. We remark in the *third* and *last* place, that our observance of the Lord's Supper tends to promote the interests of Christianity, by its distinct exhibition of the doctrine of the cross.

The importance of this doctrine is undeniable and supreme. And the doctrine is thus important, not merely because it is the only refuge of a perishing sinner, but also on account of its being essential to the success of our efforts in behalf of the Gospel.

This may appear somewhat strange when we recollect to how many the cross of Christ has

proved “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.” At first sight we should be apt to imagine that the removal or the concealment of it would be the most effectual thing for recommending Christianity, and that every degree of prominence which we give it in our ministrations must be prejudicial to the cause. But a little consideration may satisfy us that the truth is to be found in the very reverse of this supposition, and that our only hope of bringing men to the *obedience* of Christ is that of presenting to them, faithfully and broadly, the doctrine of the *cross* of Christ.

I say nothing of the unquestionable fact, that it was through the efficacy of this very doctrine, that so many glorious triumphs were obtained for the faith of Jesus in the primitive ages of the church. Neither shall I speak of the utter vanity of prevailing upon men to become believers; on the condition of our casting away the only foundation of a sinner’s hope—the merit of a crucified Redeemer. But I may ask, if the Gospel be stripped of the article in question, and of all the other tenets which rise out of it, or hinge upon it, what remains to make it either interesting or acceptable to mankind in general? In that case, the very persons for whose sake we had consented to denude it of its great peculiarity, would reject it as unnecessary, because it contained little or nothing which they did not

already find in the writings of the more enlightened heathens, or which they could not discover by their own unassisted powers. And as to the rest of mankind, what partiality could they be expected to feel for a system, which made no suitable provision for their recovery from guilt and corruption, which presented them with little else than a rule of moral duty, and which presented that rule to them separated from every powerful and constraining motive to comply with it. Offer Christianity to them in this form, and you secure for it either an immediate rejection, or a cold, fruitless, unavailing assent, which will speedily degenerate into practical infidelity.

But what a different aspect does the Gospel assume, when you hold it out to men as it really is! It then carries in its bosom, and it carries on the very face of it, the tokens of a divine original. It is distinguished by features both of design and of execution, which must prove interesting to the learned and the unlearned. It goes home to the feelings and convictions of all who attend to it, as a scheme accommodated to the character and necessities of human nature. And whatever the disciples of a proud, speculative, and carnal philosophy may be pleased to think or to say of it, the great bulk of mankind, even those who finally refuse to submit to it, are sensible that no religion is suited to their case, but one which, like the pure Gospel, makes provision for their de-

liverance from punishment and sin, and secures that blessing for them, by such means as the incarnation, and atonement of the Son of God. It is this only that they recognise as of real value to creatures placed in their circumstances. It is this only that gives them a satisfactory demonstration of the divine mercy. It is this only which lays a sure foundation for their faith and hope. And, therefore, it is this only that they will accept of, when we endeavour to gain them over to religion. It is of course essential to the attainment of our object in labouring for the support of Christianity, that we hold it forth to men in all the grace, and wisdom, and glory, which it derives from the doctrine of a divine and crucified Redeemer.

It must also be recollected, that, since this doctrine is a doctrine of the Gospel, we are not warranted to take it out of the Gospel; and that since it is a *leading* and *essential* doctrine of the Gospel, we are as little warranted in keeping it out of view, or in giving it a place subordinate to that which it occupies by divine appointment. Acting in this manner, we should neither be supporting that revelation which God has given us, nor should we be supporting it in the way agreeable to his will. And while we could not expect any success from a mode of proceeding so unauthorised by Him whose cause we profess to advocate, so even though there were success, it

could not possibly answer the great purpose of winning souls to Christ ; the blessing of our Lord is necessary to render our labours effectual : and that blessing is to be looked for only when our labours go to uphold or to advance the truth which he has committed to us, and when they are conducted in the mode which he himself has sanctioned or prescribed. As then we are sincere in our desires to promote the interests of Christianity, we must never, when commending it to the attention of our fellow-men, lose sight of the doctrine of the cross ; on the contrary, we must keep it prominently in their view—and insist upon it as that which entitles the Gospel to be called “ the power of God for salvation to every one that believeth.”

Now, my friends, it is for these and similar reasons, that I would have you to consider an observance of the Lord’s Supper, as recommended to us by its tendency to promote the cause of our holy faith. For the great doctrine of the cross is that which is mainly represented and proclaimed in this ordinance. It first of all intimates the truth of Christ’s mission, and then it intimates, not feebly and accidentally, but directly and emphatically, that he suffered and died the just for the unjust, that he might reconcile sinners unto God. The Apostle says, “ As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s *death*.” And still more explicit is

the language of our Lord himself. “This is my body broken *for you*--this is my blood, shed for many *for the remission of sins*.” The Lord’s Supper is, in the terms of its constitution, and in the import of its symbols, and in the form of its dispensation, a memorial of that sacrifice of himself, which Christ offered up when he “bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” There is no possibility of disguising or hiding this grand characteristic of the ordinance. In speaking of it, we may employ the vague phraseology of commemorating Christ—we may descant on the simplicity of the service—we may applaud it for its benignant influence on our personal and social feelings—we may rejoice in it as affording an opportunity of professing our belief in a Saviour—but when, from this indefinite language concerning the ordinance of the Supper, we turn to the ordinance itself as actually administered according to the dictates of Scripture, we are presented with a much nearer and a far more specific view of Him whom we are required to keep in remembrance. At the Lord’s table Christ is set forth as it were “crucified before our eyes”—we see him “bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows”—we behold him suffering to take away our sins—we hear him, at the conclusion of his last agony, “crying with a loud voice, It is finished”—when he “bows his head and gives up the ghost.” And no one

who is not determined to pervert the plainest truths, and to shut his eyes against the most obvious and striking facts, can fail to perceive, that a believing acknowledgment of all this is the real meaning of our service, when we eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus. Hence the peculiar importance of the feast of which we partake at the Lord's table, as a means of promoting genuine Christianity. It commemorates Christ—it represents him to the world by a solemn and standing institution, as a divine messenger; but it does a great deal more—it presents him explicitly and prominently as a suffering Saviour, and thus embodies that doctrine which, above every other, enforces the claims of the Gospel on the attention, and the belief, and the obedience of our fallen race. In this respect, it supplies those omissions and deficiencies, which too frequently mingle with other means and other attempts for the support of Christianity. They may all be so managed, as never to let it appear that the essential part of revelation is that which exhibits Christ as “giving his flesh for the life of the world.” But this is impossible with the Lord's Supper; and nothing short of its total abolition can prevent it from testifying strongly and uniformly to that blessed doctrine. The ministers of religion may neglect it in their discourses, or speak of it in such a superficial way, as to signify that it might have been omitted altogether without

much impropriety, and without any disadvantage. Many of the nominal disciples of Jesus may discard it wholly from the creed which they have embraced. In conversing with others on the subject of religion, or in pleading with them in its behalf, we may be tempted to keep it in the back ground, as unimportant in our own esteem, or as offensive and revolting in theirs. And in the course of our conduct, there may be no apparent and no declared reference to it, as the great motive to virtuous exertion and to holy living. But it is so interwoven with the ordinance of the Supper—so visibly displayed in its symbols and its acts—so loudly proclaimed by its whole administration—that the moment we sit down at a communion table, we must be understood as directing the view of all who witness our service to Jesus Christ suffering and dying on the cross, and saying from that, with equal affection and authority, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.”

If, then the doctrine of the cross is indispensable for attaining that object which should be dear to all Christians, the maintenance and prosperity of the Gospel, and if the Lord’s Supper is so admirably calculated to exhibit and perpetuate that doctrine, it surely follows that we ought “by all means to keep this feast.”

I have no doubt, my friends, that you were

convinced, previously to our discussion, of the duty of remembering Christ at his holy table. But it is always of use to have our particular grounds of obligation laid before us. This tends to satisfy us more and more that we are doing what is right and necessary—it tends to establish our faith and to increase our comfort as communicants—and it suggests to us many pleasing and profitable topics for meditation during the continuance of our service. In reference to the point which we have just now been handling, how encouraging is it to feel, that while we are declaring our own belief in Christianity, we are at the same time, and by the same deed, contributing powerfully to its advancement in the world—that while we are experiencing the love of Christ in dying for our redemption, we are uniting to honour him by recommending him to the attachment and submission of our brethren—that while we are deriving personal benefit from our engaging in the communion of his body and blood, we are also doing what may issue in the faith and comfort and salvation of others, who are yet far from God and far from righteousness—that while we are expressing and nourishing our hope of being admitted into heaven, when Jesus shall come the second time, we are instrumental by “holding forth the word of life” and the doctrine of the cross, in converting or in confirming some of whom we now know nothing, but with whom

we shall rejoice together in the kingdom that is above! Under the influence of such considerations as these, let us keep the feast as often as it is prepared for us. And, my friends, let us not rest contented with a mere participation of the ordinance, but let us maintain a life and conduct accordant with its nature and design. Let us be holy in all manner of conversation—living by faith—walking in love—given to prayer—abounding in good works. Let us act up to this character, not only as being requisite for our worthy communicating and our own eternal happiness, but as being no less necessary for the efficiency of our communion service as a means of sustaining the credit of the Gospel, and of making the name and the cross of Christ glorious upon earth.

SERMON XIX

FAITH AND PREPARATION AS TO THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

1 COR. i. 7.

Waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE coming of our Lord Jesus Christ literally refers to his appearing at the last day as the judge of the world. But in its substantial meaning, and as to all its practical effects, it may be considered as equivalent to our departure from the present into the eternal state: because when we die, not only is our future condition as much determined as it will be when Christ is actually revealed to decide upon it with all the solemnities of a public and judicial procedure, but we do in reality enter into that scene in which his award shall fix us when he pronounces our final sentence, and in which we are everlastingly to abide. There are certain circumstances in our lot, indeed, which cannot take place till the general judgment,—it is not till then that our bodies are

to be raised, and made joint partakers with our souls of whatever portion may be assigned us, and it is not till then that the righteous and the wicked shall be formally separated from each other, and their several accounts given in, and their several fates settled and proclaimed, at the great tribunal. Still, however, when we leave the world in which we now are, we go into a world of retribution; our destiny is unalterably decided; and if we have here belonged to Christ, we shall there be received and acknowledged by him, and introduced into that blessedness which, as his redeemed, we are to enjoy in his presence. In this view, Christ coming to us at the last day, and our going to Christ at death, are events of the same import; and, therefore, in discoursing on the words of the text, we shall regard them as identified, and though the remarks we have to make may sometimes apply to the one with more accuracy and appropriateness than they apply to the other, yet the application will be easily made, and there will be no real difference either in the lessons that are to be learnt, or in the consolations that are to be derived.*

Let us, then, consider what is implied in the Christian's waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

* See Appendix D.

I. It implies, in the *first* place, a firm conviction that Jesus Christ will come.

In any other state of mind, the term “waiting” would be inapplicable. It implies such a fixedness of feeling and of purpose as to render it quite inappropriate, were its object or its cause to be a matter of simple possibility or of mere supposition. The bare enunciation of it indicates, that those of whom it is asserted regard the event which is here anticipated as one of indubitable reality. It is not merely something which, in their calculation, may fall out, if such or such circumstances should occur, but it is something which will certainly be brought to pass whatever opposition may lie in the way, and whatever unlikelihood may cleave to it. And fully satisfied that this is the just and true account of Christ’s second coming, they therefore take up the unequivocal, and steady, and persevering attitude of “waiting” for it.

And, indeed, the second coming of Christ forms a part of the deliberate and cherished creed of every true disciple. It is not a mere speculation, originating in fancy, and indulged in because it is agreeable. It is not a conjecture suggested by appearances, and adhered to as being more probable, as well as more useful, than any other conjecture that could be formed on the subject. It is not the result of a process of reasoning, liable to those errors and doubts which mingle in

every attainment of the human understanding, when exercised without superior aid upon spiritual and eternal things. It is a point of settled belief, which the Christian embraces and maintains without qualification or reserve, because it is founded on the testimony of him who is equally omniscient and true. It is the subject of a divine prediction—of a divine promise—of a divine assurance: And therefore the credit which he attaches to its reality is as unlimited as are his conceptions of the extent of God's attributes, and of the excellence of God's character. He cannot withhold his full assent to it without impeaching the absolute perfection of that absolutely perfect Being by whom it has been attested; for this would be to allege that the Lord has uttered a prediction which he has not power to accomplish—that he has held forth a promise which he intends not to fulfil—that he has given an assurance whose purpose is only to deceive and to betray those who confide in it. But when he believes in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, he does nothing more than set to his seal that God who has declared it, is unbounded in prescience and mercy, in faithfulness and might.

His conviction, too, will derive strength and liveliness from the frequency, and the clearness, and the emphasis with which the great truth it relates to is presented to him in the volume of inspiration.

It is not once or twice offered to his attention ; it is repeatedly and often stated as a part of revelation ; it is couched in the most distinct and intelligible phraseology ; it is accompanied with all that variety of language, of imagery, and of connection, which is calculated to make a strong impression on the mind ; and it is so much interwoven with the texture of Scripture, as indited by the Saviour and his apostles, that the Christian can scarcely peruse any considerable portion of it without hearing, as it were, the voice of God intimating to him plainly and powerfully the “ coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Nay it is not set down merely as one of a multitude of events which are certainly to happen, and from which it may be detached as having no immediate or necessary connection with them. It is represented as a constituent portion of that scheme which the Son of God undertook to execute as the Redeemer of sinful men. He came into this world, and gave himself to suffering and death, that “ whosoever believeth in him may not perish but have everlasting life ;” and all who in this world believe in him, as God has given commandment, are justified, and sanctified, and made meet for heaven. But had the plan of salvation proceeded no farther it would have been incomplete, and the purposes of its great author would have been wholly frustrated. And, therefore, it

constitutes an essential part of that work which had been given Christ to do, that he should carry out all that he had finished of it in time into its eternal results—that he should ultimately gather in the fruits of his mediatorial sufferings and labours—that his own glory should be demonstrated and made conspicuous by conducting his people into that glory for which they were destined, and to which he had procured their undisputed title—that he should place them secure in that region of sinless purity and unmingled blessedness which had been purposed for them by his Father from the foundation of the world, which he had shed his precious blood to purchase and to purify for them, and to which he had all along directed their hopes, as their final and everlasting abode. So that the Christian, looking to the Gospel, not as a collection of *insulated* statements, but as a combination of *harmonious* statements, forming one indivisible whole, he is constrained, on believing one part of it, to believe in all the rest. His faith does not rest more surely upon its past history than upon its future issues. Fully satisfied that the work has been performed, he is as much satisfied that the recompence will follow. And he is no more confident that Christ was “once offered to bear the sins of many,” than he is confident that “unto them who look for him Christ will appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.”

II. But while the words of the text imply the Christian's conviction that his Saviour will come again, they imply, in the *second* place, that this event is the subject of his habitual thought and contemplation.

How, indeed, can it be otherwise, seeing it is so true and so important in his regard? Were it a circumstance of merely probable occurrence;—were it a fact of little interest in its nature or of little moment in its consequences;—or were it nothing more than a dry abstract truth which might amuse the intellect, but could have no effect on the character or the fate of those who assented to it,—the mind of the Christian could not entertain it with much cordiality, or look forward to the period of its being realized with any intensity of feeling. In this case, he might neglect it without being conscious of any fault, as he might forget it without experiencing any disadvantage; and, indeed, it would naturally and insensibly glide away from his observation or his remembrance as a thing of nought. But how differently must he be affected towards it, when he considers its indubitable certainty—the touching concerns which it involves—the various attractions which it presents in its every aspect—and the bearing which it has on all that he now is, and all that he is to be for ever! He beholds in it an event which goes to manifest the glory of his God and Saviour in a style in which it has never

yet met his eye or filled his imagination—an event which is to be the winding up and the consummation of that scheme of mercy, which in its previous details has occupied and engrossed his attention above all that he knows besides of the history of the universe—an event by which the vast and splendid scene of immortality, with all its objects, and awards, and joys, and sorrows, is to be unfolded to his view—an event which is to fix his own destiny, and to introduce him into his own appointed habitation in the eternal world—an event, moreover, which presses upon his faith, as one which no interference of created power can either prevent or defer, and which must as assuredly come to pass as God is true and omnipotent. This event, therefore, must necessarily engage his mind—not sometimes, but frequently—not for a short season, but continually—not with slight and superficial, but with strong and deep felt emotions—not merely when suggested to him by what he reads or hears, but when he is selecting topics of grave and solemn meditation—not only while employed in the sacred exercises and duties of religion, but also while employed in the cares, and pursuits, and avocations of a busy life—not solely in those times of sickness and of sorrow which naturally turn our views to those consolatory and animating prospects which futurity presents to an afflicted saint, but even in health, and prosperity, when nature wears her gayest smile, when the

world hangs out all her fascinating charms, when this earth looks as if it might be our everlasting rest, and as if it were idle or unnecessary to cast one glance above it or beyond it. The true believer cannot deny to the coming of Christ such an application, and such a homage of his spirit, without betraying an inherent insensibility to whatever is most momentous and most interesting. The mere natural man thinks much and thinks seriously of those events which he is convinced are to befall him, and are to enhance or to maintain his worldly fortunes ; he feels it impossible to do otherwise. And much more must it be impossible for him who is a Christian to withhold his anticipations, or to refrain from indulging in them often, and intensely, and in all circumstances, when they are carried forward by an unwavering faith to the advent of Him whom he regards as his Saviour, his Sovereign, and his exceeding great reward ? It is a great and glorious reality ; and, therefore, he fondly entertains the conception of it—muses and ponders anxiously upon its different aspects and bearings—looks to it in the various lights in which it is represented in the word of promise—and gives it such a resting place in the thoughts of the imaginations of his heart, that it is habitually present to him, as that which deserves and receives his paramount, and cherished, and unceasing regard.

Let me ask you, my friends, if you can say con-

scientifically, though humbly, that this is descriptive of you? Are you in the habit of stretching your views forward to the second coming of Christ? Does this exercise come naturally and easy to you, or does it require effort? Is it engaged in with reluctance, and is it soon and readily relinquished? When you were wearied out with care and disappointment—when sickness confined you to a bed of pain and languishing—or when you thought that the hand of death was upon you, it is more than probable that you turned to the prospect we are speaking of as a source of consolation suited to your circumstances; but did this prospect continue to engage your thoughts and interest your feelings, after your life was, as it were, given back to you—after your health was renovated and restored—after your worldly adversities had passed away, and providence smiled upon your outward lot? The books you have read, the discourses you have heard, the conversation in which you have mingled, may have directed your minds towards it, and caused them to realize it with clearness, and to dwell upon it with the glow of enthusiasm and delight: But having shut your book—having ceased to hear the preacher's voice—having turned away from the companion or the friend who talked with you—having gone into the haunts of business and of active life, or retired into the silence

of privacy and retirement—did the hope of a coming and triumphant Redeemer still linger in your soul, or did it fade away at once from your consciousness and your recollection, or did it affect you no more than did the expectation of some temporal good, which you could not count upon, and which was almost as worthless as it was uncertain. Is it very long ago since you voluntarily and delightedly gave wings to your faith and your imagination, that they might take their flight to that coming scene in which Christ is to be manifested for your ultimate redemption, and that they might bring back to you the strength, and consolation, and encouragement which your necessities require? How often has the subject occurred to, and been entertained by your minds, as the theme of complacent meditation, during the course of the week that is just concluded? Did you think of it, or did you forget it, even on this morning which commemorates that glorious rising of the Lord Jesus, which established his dominion over the grave, and gave the pledge for your resurrection to meet him when he comes the second time? And when we read the words of the Apostle in my text, did you listen to them as presenting a fact with which your hearts had been intimately conversant before, or did it come upon you as a fact from which you had been previously estranged, and which broke in upon

the ordinary and regular current of your mental occupations?

Let these questions, and such as these, search and try you: and be assured, that if the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ be not in thought and contemplation, an inmate of your bosoms, it is but too just to conclude, that your faith is weak or that it is wanting—that the world is maintaining a disastrous influence over your inner man—that Satan is deceiving you with a vain confidence in knowledge and speculation as to your concern in the future—and that you have much need to watch, and pray, and examine yourselves, and strive after more vigorous and realizing views of Him for whom you profess to wait, and who will assuredly come to demonstrate the eternal difference that subsists between profession and reality, in the judgment of omniscience.

III. In the *third* place, the words of the text imply a diligent and faithful preparation for the coming of Christ.

Unless we had this preparation, we could never with any propriety be said to wait for Christ's coming, because if unprepared for his coming, it would be an event to be feared and deprecated, and from which the mind would recoil with aversion and alarm. The same authority which tells us, that Christ will come again, tells us, that he

will come for two purposes. One of these is, to reward his people; and the other is, to punish his enemies. But if we are among the number of his enemies—if we are not of such principles, and of such a character, as that he will approve of us—if we are not fit and ready to meet him, and to stand before him, and to become partakers of the happiness which he is to dispense—if we live and die destitute of those qualifications which he himself has prescribed as necessary for our admission into his heavenly kingdom—then, when he comes, we must be utterly excluded from that kingdom, and suffer the condemnation which he has threatened against all those who have refused or neglected to become what he, as the Saviour of sinners and the Lord of all, required them to be. And, in this view, so far from waiting for his second coming, we will turn away from it as an object of terror, and labour to banish it from our thoughts, or to erase it from our creed. To the waiting for Christ that is here spoken of, appointed preparation, spiritual meetness, is indispensably necessary. And when conscious that we have made that preparation—that we are possessed of this meetness,—we voluntarily and cheerfully look forward to Christ's advent, because it brings with it that blessed recompense of which our conceptions cannot be too lofty, and for which our desires cannot be too ardent. The preparation and the recom-

pense are graciously, but indissolubly, united ; so that distinguished by the one, we are sure of attaining to the other. And, therefore, inasmuch as we have the preparation to which the recompense is annexed, we will wait for the coming of Christ, who brings the recompense along with him, and who will bestow it upon us in the exercise of his power as a Prince, a Saviour, and a Judge.

It is very true, there may be persons who think that they wait for the coming of Christ, and yet are unprepared : but they labour under a delusion ; they either misapprehend the system under whose operation they are placed, or they flatter themselves that they are adorned with qualities which do not in fact belong to them. They have no title to *wait* for the coming of Christ—and if they continue thus to deceive themselves, they will find in the end of their career, that they had been waiting for him who was coming to pronounce upon them the sentence of destruction, and to hurl them into the perdition of ungodly men. Those only in whom Christ now recognises the features of his redeemed, and whom he will finally acknowledge as his own, have any right to assume the attitude of waiting for his second coming, or can assume that attitude with any degree of safety or consistency. And, therefore, it becomes us all to examine ourselves so as to ascertain whether we belong to the one class or to the other, and whether we

can justly appropriate to ourselves the language by which true Christians are here characterized and described.

Now, to have a full and accurate view of the character which constitutes our preparation for Christ's second coming, it is proper that we study the whole of that revelation which he has given us for our instruction and guidance. And we will never be satisfied, so long as there is any danger of our being unacquainted with a single portion of what he recommends to us, or exacts from us, as his disciples. But perhaps it may be sufficient at present to confine ourselves to its leading properties, as these are stated in that passage of the 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians, in which we are told that Christ is to come that he may be "glorified in his *saints*, and admired of all them that *believe*."

1. Those who wait for his coming, and are prepared for that event, are such as *believe*. It is not enough that Christ while on earth gave himself as a sacrifice to atone for our guilt, and that he is held out in that capacity as the only medium through which justification can be obtained by the sinner. That is a great and essential truth—the leading doctrine of the Gospel—a doctrine without which we should be utterly without God and without hope. But the mere existence of such a statement, or of such a propitiation as that to which it refers, will not save

us. For this purpose, we must believe in Him who gave himself as an offering to expiate our sins, and make reconciliation for our iniquities. We must be united to him by faith—by that faith which, renouncing all that is in ourselves as wholly unworthy of trust, looks to and rests upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ as all-perfect and all-sufficient, and in this way makes us one with him, and of course partakers of his redemption. Thus depending upon him, the blood of atonement actually avails to the obtaining of our pardon from God, and to the making us “accepted of him in the beloved.” Our interest in the divine favour is experimentally secured. The inheritance of heaven is made over to us, personally and individually. And there is not only no condemnation to us, and *shall* be no condemnation, but we shall have everlasting life. Relying on Christ, then, in the exercise of a true faith, we may be waiting for his second coming, because his merit, received and appropriated by that faith, has cancelled our guilt, the prevalence of which would have made his coming terrible, and has obtained for us a title to the celestial kingdom, which we never could have entered through any doings or deservings of our own. And in this manner we can be said, scripturally and really, to be waiting for the last advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, only when we have cast ourselves upon his grace and power as the Re-

deemer of a lost world—when we have believed on him with the heart unto righteousness as the holy and merciful God has commanded—when we exert such a habitual and unreserved trust in his sufficiency that we may be said to live by faith in him—and when, amidst all our attainments in well-doing and in spite of all the suggestions of pride, we still cleave to his finished work as the only foundation of our hope, and still abide in him with such close and unwavering affiance, that “when he shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

2. But in order to have the character of preparation which is implied in waiting for the coming of Christ, we must not only be *believers*, we must also be *saints*;—we must be sanctified or holy persons. When Christ comes the second time it is to conduct his people to their promised rest, to their heavenly reward. But while the very idea of being his people necessarily comprehends our being redeemed from our iniquities, and purified to himself, and zealous of good works, the final purpose of his advent still more clearly and impressively points out the necessity of our being pure in heart and life. For how can he take us into his Father’s house, if our principles, and dispositions, and habits, are all in irreconcilable hostility to the exercises and enjoyments of that blessed abode? And can our prin-

ciples, and dispositions, and habits be otherwise than in this state of enmity, when we have no real love to God in our souls, and no true obedience to him in our conduct? Nothing that defileth can enter into the New Jerusalem. If it were possible for us while polluted with sin, to be admitted there, even *there* we could not be happy; and therefore neither the divine wisdom nor the divine purity could allow our introduction, in such circumstances, into such a place. Being in the condition of unholy persons, indeed, we give evidence that we are destitute of saving faith, and consequently have no concern in that perfect righteousness, by which Christ establishes a right to heaven in behalf of those that believe in him. But besides this, the right to heaven could not be made good or practically enjoyed, unless we had moreover that personal righteousness by which we are made meet for the blessedness of the upper world, and without which we are expressly assured we can never see the Lord. Accordingly, there is ample provision made in the Gospel scheme for our sanctification, or our acquisition of that moral fitness which is essential to us in the prospect of Christ's second coming. That scheme, indeed, is so framed and constituted, that every part of it exercises a purifying influence on those by whom it has been sincerely embraced. Whether we look to its origin, its progress, or its end—its promises or its threat-

enings—its doctrines, its precepts, its ordinances, its examples, or its prospects, it is altogether calculated to wean us from the love and the practice of sin, and to form us to the highest style of spiritual excellence. But as it specifically requires this, so it is specifically designed to accomplish it. One grand object of Christ's mission as a Redeemer, is to deliver us from the power and the defilements of sin, which naturally maintains its corrupt dominion over us. This object he attains by the virtue of his cross, and by the agency of his Spirit. And one essential part of his saving work is lost upon us, unless we surrender ourselves to the combined operation of his cross and Spirit, so that we may be renewed by it in the spirit of our minds, and become a willing and obedient people in the day of his power. It is not merely that we undergo some external reformation—that we correct or subdue certain vicious propensities—that we exhibit such amiable or useful qualities as may gain us the approbation of our brethren—that we be honest, respectable, peaceable, benevolent, members of society, and go to the grave with the regrets and lamentations of those whom we have left behind. No, my friends, it is that we be the subjects of a thorough, inward, and pervading change—that we be regenerated, and made new creatures—that we exchange the service of Satan for the service of God—that the love of God be shed

abroad in our hearts, so that loving him with supreme affection we be devoted to the well doing which he requires—that we scrupulously deny ourselves to whatsoever would pollute us with the abominable thing which he hates—that we labour to abound in all those “fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus to his glory and praise”—that, in short, we be like Christ for whom we wait, and by whom we are to be rewarded, and with whom we are to dwell for ever.

Thus combining the character of saints with the character of believers, we are, in his own estimation, of those who wait for his second coming. He sees us clothed in the robe of his untainted righteousness; and therefore can present us without spot and blameless before the presence of his Father's glory, and as the heirs of that kingdom which was “prepared from the foundation of the world.” He sees us “created again in himself unto good works,” adorned with the graces of his Spirit, and meet for the habitations of the just; and therefore can welcome us into that joy which is inseparably united with conformity to the divine image, and which it is his high and delighted prerogative to confer upon all who have not only “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” but who have also, by a “patient continuance in well doing, been seeking for glory, and honour, and immortality.” And thus, as there is now the testimony

of his own word, so there will be at his appearing, the still more decisive and enrapturing testimony of his judicial sentence, that we form a part of that happy number, who are “waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

But what shall I say to those who are *not* prepared for the second coming of Christ? He comes then, to be “glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe”—but to “punish with everlasting destruction them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of his Son.” Awful prospect! and as certain as it is awful! You take no pains to acquaint yourselves with the all-perfect God: you refuse submission to the eternal Son of the eternal Father: you are content to live at a distance from Him who is the sovereign arbiter of your fate—in rebellion against his authority—in contempt of the salvation which he offers—in defiance of the judgment which he threatens. And instead of believing what he declares, and doing what he commands, you cast all his declarations, and all his commandments behind your back. And perhaps you sneer at the men who have left you in “the broad way that leadeth to destruction,” and betaken themselves to “the narrow way that leadeth unto life;” and make use, for the purpose of ridiculing them, of the very terms by which their divine Lord asserts their relation to him, and their preparation for his hea-

venly kingdom, calling them *believers* and *saints*, as if your imagined reproach were not their honour and their glory in the sight of God. O persist not in this impious and destructive career. Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. Take refuge where alone it is to be found for any sinner, under the Redeemer's cross. And believing that he will come again, let your remaining days be devoted to the work of preparation for that all-interesting and all-momentous event.

SERMON XX.

ARDENT DESIRE FOR THE SECOND COMING
OF CHRIST.

1 COR. i. 7.

Waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

IN discoursing on these words we have considered them as implying these three things—a firm conviction that Christ will come again—the habitual contemplation of that event—and diligent and faithful preparation for it.

IV. We now proceed to observe, in the *fourth* place, that they imply a decided and ardent desire for the second coming of Christ.

If we truly believe that Christ will come again, if his second coming be the object of our habitual thought and contemplation, and if we be conscious of being prepared, or of having the requisite meetness for it, it must on every principle of nature and of reason, be productive of this desire. The feeling is dictated by all our present experience, and by all our future prospects. There are evils from which that event alone can

emancipate us, and there are enjoyments to which that event alone can introduce us. And if it be a right thing to wish for deliverance from the one, and for the attainment of the other, then it is right to wish for the second advent of Christ because that is identified with both advantages. Nay, it will be as impossible for us to repress this desire or to be without it, as it is for us to take delight in enduring what gives us pain, or in foregoing what gives us satisfaction, when we are called to neither sacrifice by a sense of duty, or by the hope of ultimate and superior benefit. And not to experience it, and not to cherish it, would be to show that we are destitute of the common sensibilities of our nature, or that our convictions of the reality of the blessings we look for are slight and feeble, or that we have no proper sense of their value and importance, or that we have no conscious interest in them, and no personal fitness for them.

Those, indeed, who, though professing Christianity, have no spiritual discernment of its truths, and no experimental acquaintance with its power and its blessings, cannot easily enter into this sentiment, or understand either how it should be much fostered or how it should have much influence. They do not take any great concern in the second coming of the Saviour; it is with them rather a doctrine to which they have been accustomed to give a spe-

culative assent, than a doctrine which they have embraced with the heart, as equally momentous and true. The world, besides, has got hold of their affections, and they are contented with it, or they rejoice in it; and dead to the superiority of that better world which lies beyond it, or impressed with the apprehension that heaven is still only offered to them and not accepted by them, and that, therefore, the change, come when it may, will be disastrous to them, they cannot wish for—they must rather deprecate, its arrival; and this being the state of their own minds, they cannot sympathise with the emotions of those whose minds are in the opposite state, and are apt to consider the language which expresses a longing for it, as the language of a disordered fancy, or of an irrational enthusiasm. And yet there is nothing less fanciful, and nothing more rational, than the desire which they thus ridicule and deride. If a powerful, generous, and beloved friend has assured us that he is coming to visit our abode, and if his coming is to exhibit *himself* in a more attractive and interesting light than he ever assumed before, and to add in a high degree to *our* dignity, and safety, and happiness, what would be thought of us by men of the world, if we were so indifferent to the prospect, as to have no desire that our friend should actually come, and realize the promise on which he had taught us to rely? Would not they accuse

us of base and stupid insensibility ; and wonder that we should be so lost to all that regards our own well being, as well as to that which involves the character of him who is to honour us with his presence, and enrich us with his gifts ? Very well ; and why then should they censure us, or why should they be surprised at us, when we look with *desire* for the second coming of Christ, who is a friend infinitely more powerful, and generous, and beloved, than any earthly friend can ever be—whose advent will give us the grandest and most endearing manifestation of his own excellence that we can ever hope to witness,—and who is to confer upon us such tokens of his love as eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, and the heart of man hath not been able to conceive ? Professing to believe in Christ's second coming, and yet so careless whether he comes or not as not to wish for it, *they* exhibit the conduct which should justify that marvelling with which they contemplate *us*, or rather they demonstrate that their belief is an outward profession, and not an inward principle. But we who *do* believe in Christ's second coming, and in all the blessed and glorious accompaniments of that event, as they are presented to us in the book of inspiration, might well be astonished at ourselves, and regard it as a practical denial of the original tendencies and susceptibilities of our moral constitution, were we not to feel our souls drawn

out as it were in earnest and irresistible longing after that which is so attractive in all its aspects, and so fitted to awaken and to nourish our keenest ambition.

Let us only have a fixed and lively faith in Christ's second coming, and desire for it will follow of course. It is as much and as necessarily the fruit of such a faith, as is our actual preparation for the event. Men do not prepare for that event, just because they do not truly and cordially believe in its certainty and in its circumstances. If they did so believe, they would as naturally prepare for the coming of Christ as they would prepare for any important thing that was to befall them, or any responsible situation into which they were to enter in a present world. And in like manner when our faith in the coming of Christ is distinct and powerful, and realizes that as what will assuredly happen, and takes hold of every thing connected with it which affects the glory of the Redeemer and our own eternal salvation, we will as naturally desire it as we will desire the coming to pass of any change in the future course of life which we are not only confident will take place, but which, when it takes place, will secure for us what is essential to our temporal comfort and prosperity. And if our fixed belief in Christ's second coming has wrought out in our mind and character a suitable preparation for it, our desire will be the warmer and more energetic, because

in that case not only will a conscious fitness for the appearance of the Redeemer remove all the anxiety and terror which, considered in itself, it is calculated to create, but our affections being purified, and our relish for heavenly things quickened and matured, all that it presents to our view will wear a more engaging complexion, and be felt as more deserving of our fond regard.

The indulgence of this desire in reference to Christ's second coming was exemplified by the Apostle Paul. It appears from his writings not merely that he frequently meditated on that prospect for his comfort in sorrow and his encouragement in duty, but that he viewed it as a legitimate object of sincere and fervent wishes, and that such wishes were no strangers to his bosom. "We groan," said he, "earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven." And this desire to meet with Christ, and to enjoy the unspeakable honours and advantages of that meeting, was evidently in the case of the apostle the result of the operation of his faith. He was indeed beset with many difficulties and dangers and distresses, which rendered his continued residence in this world irksome and distasteful; and to escape from these was doubtless one motive for his groaning for deliverance and for admission into a better state. And no wonder, considering how much he was

actually suffering, and how much suffering still awaited him, if he remained in this vale of tears. But his faith, which no doubt supported him in these peculiarly trying circumstances, lifted his views forward to the scene of future blessedness, and brought before the eye of his mind the mighty and the merciful Jesus appearing for his eternal redemption ; and anticipating the transcendant felicity which was thus set before him, as well as relying on the righteousness which secured, and the promise that was made of it, he hungered and thirsted after its reality as that whose value was as incalculable as its attainment was undoubted. “Therefore we are always confident,” says he, “knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, (for we walk by faith and not by sight,) we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

Nor are we to deem this language exclusively appropriate to the Apostle, or to men of equal faith and of equal affliction. Doubtless the stronger the faith and the heavier the afflictions by which any one is distinguished, the more determinate will be his desires for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, because there is a stronger repulsion to him on earth, and a stronger attraction for him in heaven ; he has more powerful reasons for going away from this inhospitable

clime ; and he has a clearer and more realizing view of the glory that is to be revealed, and of the paradise where he is to dwell for ever. But still in whatever proportion we possess a true belief in Christ's coming, and feel the weariness and the woe of our present abode, in that proportion will be the strength of our desire to escape out of the wilderness, and to behold him who, at his second coming, is to conduct us into the promised land. It may be more or less vehement according to the prevalence of those principles, and the brightness of those views, by which it is engendered and fed. But still it will exist and operate in each and all of us who wait in faith for the coming of the Saviour. Every one of us that believes, will be conscious of the working of that sentiment which animated the Apostle when he said in his Epistle to the Philippians, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."

And surely, my friends, there is not a Christian among you, in whose mind, though his faith be small as a grain of mustard seed, and though he be deemed less than the least of all saints, these words do not find a counterpart. In the contrast that subsists between what you are now, and what you expect to be when Christ shall come, there is abundant reason for your feeling and cherishing the sentiment of which we are now speaking. There is abundant reason not only for your feel-


ing it, when worldly comfort fails you, and one calamity after another presses upon your fate, and you are borne down by such extremity of pain, that even though you had no hope beyond the grave, you would be ready to choose death rather than life, but also for your cherishing it, when no harassing difficulties beset your path, when no direful distresses agonise your bosoms, when no frightful perils impend over your heads, when your way is as smooth, and your sky as unclouded, and your cup as full, and your prospects as gay and smiling, as ever were those of any of the children of men. With all the exemptions from evil, and with all the participation of good, that you either do experience or can hope to experience, still this is but a desert place—it is a polluted land—and none of you, from what you know, or see, or conceive of it, can say respecting it, “This is our rest for ever, here will we dwell, for we have desired it.” And, O! when you think of the celestial abodes, with all their beauty, and with all their bliss, where the toils and trials and tribulations of mortality shall be neither felt nor feared any more, and amid whose sublime exercises and rapturous enjoyments all that is holiest and best in our present state shall appear in the retrospect as a very little thing, how can you restrain the outgoing of your affections towards that expected period when “he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry,” and when his com-

ing will be the signal of your admission into those everlasting habitations, on which your eyes are now fixed, and into which you long and expect to enter.

Here you are subject to disease—to its pain, and its languishing, and its mortal issue. But when your Saviour comes, he will put upon you the crown of life—he will clothe you with the robe of immortality—and you shall neither sicken, nor suffer, nor die any more.

Here your reputation may be wounded from ignorance or from envy, from prejudice or from malevolence. The slander of your foes may deprive you of the attachment of your friends. And the grave itself may scarcely shield you from its malignant assaults. But when your Saviour comes, he will place you conspicuously among those whom God hath justified, and whom no man can condemn—in whose society calumny cannot reach you, and reproach cannot hurt you—and whose unfeigned love, inspired and cherished by Him who has himself pronounced you acquitted and blessed, shall infinitely more than compensate you for all the detractions that may have been poured upon your character in this evil and misjudging world.

Here you may have to struggle with the numerous ills and hardships of poverty—aggravated by the comforts and independence which preceded it, and by the scorn and the desertion of



those whom your bounty had formerly supported and fed. But when your Saviour comes, you shall have no wants which he will not supply with unexhaustible abundance ; he will give you the true riches that can never be wasted nor taken from you ; he will conduct you into his Father's house, where there is bread enough and to spare : he will bestow upon you the "inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Here your chosen and your cherished friends may betray you when you are most confiding—those with whom you associated and took sweet counsel may be removed far away from you—the husband or the wife, the parent or the child, the brother or the sister, who dwelt with you, and was dear to you as your own soul, may be torn from your embrace by the relentless hand of death, and buried from your sight amid the corruptions and desolations of the grave. But when your Saviour comes, he will wind up this scene of trial, with all its painful separations, and all its inroads on the ties of friendship, and all its agonies and its wailings for departed kindred ; he will take you where ingratitude, and treachery, and dissolution, shall be alike unknown ; he will unite you with the church of the first born, with those who, being made perfect, cannot be loved too fondly or confided in too freely ; and he will unite you with them by bonds of

affection which never can be broken, but which shall grow stronger, and closer, and more endearing, as eternity rolls on.

Here you have the plague of sin to trouble and torment you ; wherever you are, and whatever you do, Satan tempts, the world allures, your own hearts deceive and betray you into its indulgencies ; and thus dishonouring your nature and offending your God, amidst all your labours to be conformable to the divine will, you feel a bitterness of spirit more galling and intolerable by far, than can be inflicted by all the external misfortunes and calamities of life. But when your Saviour comes, he will place you where you shall be beyond the reach of temptation, and beyond the fear and the capacity of transgressing ; where delighting in the vision of God at once immaculate, and reconciled, and full of love, not a single unholy thought shall ever once glance through your imagination ; and where, as it shall be the theme of your gratitude that you have been washed from all your sins in the blood of atonement, so it will be the theme of your rejoicing that no moral stain shall ever again pollute your nature or impair your comfort.

Here your eye and your heart are often pained by the sight of abounding iniquity : But when your Saviour comes he will conduct you into a region as pure as it is happy—all whose objects are holy, all whose pursuits are holy, all whose

inhabitants are holy, even as God himself is holy.

Here the very best services you can render—the most conscientious obedience you can yield—the highest attainments you can make in goodness and in virtue, are mixed with much imperfection and weakness, with many shortcomings and violations of duty. But when your Saviour comes, he will so refine and exalt the powers of your moral constitution, and so surround you with all that can give them their highest and their purest exercise, as to elevate you above all the errors which now cleave to your fallen humanity—to carry you forward with uninterrupted impulse in your career of intellectual and spiritual excellence, and so far as the creature can resemble the Creator, to make you “perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Here all your enjoyments, however exquisite, and however multiplied, and however prolonged, are but mingled at the best, unsatisfactory, uncertain, and soon over. But when your Saviour comes, he will impart to you a happiness suited to all the capacities of your renewed and perfected nature, overflowing in its abundance, unalloyed in every pleasure of which it consists, large as the largest wishes of your heart, and immortal as the souls that are to enjoy it,—as the uncreated source from which it is to flow.

Here it is a trial to your patience that the cross of Christ should be such a rock of offence, and that he who bore its agony and its shame for the expiation of human guilt should be “despised and rejected of men,” that his grace and his authority should be trampled upon by the very apostates whom he suffered to save, and that his people, bearing his name and supporting his cause, should be exposed on that account to so much persecution and reproach. But when your Saviour comes, he will appear in mighty power and in dazzling glory—his enemies will be punished with the destruction from which they would not permit him to redeem them—the numberless trophies of his humiliation and his blood will be assembled to magnify and to honour him—and all the hosts of heaven will unite with all the redeemed from the earth, to ascribe to him the blessing, and the praise, and the dominion, which he had so richly won for himself, by achieving the salvation of a guilty world, and bringing a countless multitude of ruined creatures back to the God from whom they had departed, and to the felicity which they had forfeited and lost.

Experiencing such evils, and looking forward to such a deliverance, desire for the second coming of Christ must necessarily exist and prevail in your minds. Whether in prosperity or in adversity, you cannot but cherish it as you anticipate that event. Not a step can you take in the

journey of life, but the circumstances of your condition will suggest it. When overtaken by the storm of persecution, and involved in the depths of outward distress or of spiritual calamity, it will become strong, ardent, and predominant. And when, in the hour of dissolution, you cast the eye of faith to him in whom you trust, and hear him saying, "Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me"—you will be ready to reply, in full purpose and earnest longing of affection, "Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

SERMON XXI.

PATIENT WAITING FOR THE SECOND
COMING OF CHRIST.

I COR. i. 7.

Waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

IN our last discourse on these words, we considered them as implying an ardent and decided desire for the event to which they refer.

V. It now only remains to observe, in the *fifth* place, that the words of the text imply that the Christian waits for the coming of his Saviour in the exercise of patience and resignation.

Submission to the divine arrangements is a necessary part of the Christian character, at all times, and in all circumstances. He who is destitute of this grace shows himself to be destitute of the very first principles of a believer in God and in Christ. And whatever he may have in other respects, he wants that without which the Gospel cannot be to him either a standard of faith or a

rule of conduct, in such a sense, or to such an extent, as to carry him to heaven. But while this spirit of submission must distinguish him in general, and pervade all the workings of his mind, and the whole tenor of his deportment; there are cases in which it is more conspicuously becoming and indispensable, and in which it is expedient to have it more especially recommended and enforced. One of these is the case now under consideration. The believer is supposed to be looking forward to the second coming of Christ with strong and ardent desire; and not merely is his desire produced by a belief in the superiority of the heavenly world to which he then expects to go, over the present world in which he is still doomed to dwell, but his desire is vehement in proportion to the liveliness of those views which he entertains respecting the happiness on which he is to enter, and the severity of those evils, from whose pressure the change which he anticipates is wholly and for ever to emancipate him. If his faith be so vigorous as to realize with great clearness the glories of the future state—if his hopes are remarkably vivid and assured—if his existing circumstances have been stripped of many of those comforts and allurements which formerly wedded him to the earth—and if numerous and protracted distresses have destroyed his relish for the place which he now inhabits, and hedged him in to the contem-

plation of immortality as that in which alone he can expect to find repose—in such a situation he is apt to become discontented with his continuance in the world—to fret and complain that his stay in it is unduly prolonged—and so to wish for admittance into those better, and brighter, and more blissful regions that lie beyond it, as to make his present condition unreasonably irksome, and its various duties distasteful and oppressive. And, therefore, it is peculiarly proper to remind believers, who are either thus tempted, or are in danger of being so tempted, of the necessity of a humble and cheerful acquiescence in the will of God, whether he is pleased to shorten or to lengthen their abode in the wilderness. And it is the more especially proper and useful to remind them of this, when we are exhorting them to cherish the desire of Christ's second coming—not only teaching them that such an affection is natural and lawful, but representing it to them as necessarily resulting from true faith in the reality of that event, and conscious preparation for the felicity into which it is to introduce them.

Nor are these two things in any degree inconsistent. The one is by no means a negation of the other. My desire for Christ's second coming does not infer that, in the blameable meaning of the phrase, I am impatient for it. The patience in which I am required to possess my

soul is only a qualification of the desire which I am supposed to have for the Saviour's appearance. It is a different, but not an opposite grace. It modifies, and, in this manner it improves and perfects, instead of impairing or destroying what it seems to counteract. And it effects this by preventing an emotion, which in certain instances needs to be restrained, from going to excess, and still permitting it to operate, as far as it can do so in consistency with Christian principles. The desire for Christ's coming might be carried to such a length as to interfere with moral obligation, to mar spiritual progress, to produce inquietude and discomfort of spirit. But when patience is allowed to have its perfect work, these injurious consequences are hindered, and the mind is brought into such a state, that the longing in which it indulges for the coming of Christ is made subservient at once to its consolation and improvement, and the character in which both are comprehended, is rendered more conformable to the character prescribed in the Gospel. It was somewhat on this principle that there was no contradiction in our Lord's prayer of agony in the garden. His prayer contained a petition, and an earnest one it was, that his cup of affliction might pass from him; and yet that earnest petition was accompanied with a declaration of the most simple and entire acquiescence in the trial of drinking that cup to

its very dregs, until it pleased his heavenly Father that the trial should be fully endured. And when we ask with fervour, and even importunity, the removal of any personal or outward calamity with which we are visited, we do what is alike dictated by nature, and sanctioned by religion; but we are conscious of no contradiction, and of no insincerity, when we conjoin with these supplications the feeling and the expression of resignation to the prospect of those evils being continued, whose removal we had so eagerly implored. In like manner the believer, in waiting for the coming of Christ, while he nourishes the most cordial and vehement desire for the arrival of that event, cannot but feel that he is required to do nothing incompatible with this sentiment, when he is required to let it be always accompanied and mingled with such patience and resignation as are due to the management of God, and as constitute a portion of his meetness for heaven.

Let no one, however, deceive himself with the idea that he is right and safe, merely because he cannot be charged with impatience for Christ's second coming. Your not being guilty of the sin of impatience, does not imply that you have the grace of patience with respect to that event. What you deem patience may be neither more nor less than indifference. You may have no belief that Christ will come again, and no love

for his appearing, because no fitness for it. In that case, you cannot feel the desire of which we have been speaking. And not feeling the desire, there is no room and no call for the exercise of patience. You either deprecate the event or you are careless about it; and therefore the idea of resignation when it is delayed, is inapplicable to *you*. So far from there being the least danger of your encouraging yourselves to any thing like inordinate desire for Christ's coming, the danger results from your not having the sentiment in your breasts at all, and consequently your being destitute of those principles and that character without which Christ must appear for your everlasting destruction. Be careful, therefore, to guard against the delusion arising from mere passiveness of mind on this subject. That is not patience. And it may consist with a state of mind in which neither desire nor patience has obtained any footing. Before you rest satisfied with the supposition that you have the latter, be first satisfied that you have the former, and that in your case it is dictated by that faith in Christ, that attachment to him, and that preparation for his coming, which alone can warrant and justify its indulgence.

To you who are truly waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the description of that character which has been al-

ready given, I would recommend the exercise of patience and resignation, however long the event may be deferred, and whatever may be your difficulties and sufferings till it arrives. You have good reasons for cultivating this virtue in such circumstances. And if you only consider these, and yield to their influence, while it will not render your hope of Christ's coming less lively or less solacing, it will have the effect of increasing your fitness for it, by increasing the correspondence between what you are and what you expect to be.

1. In the *first* place, you should wait for Christ's second coming with patience, because, the period of that coming is fixed by God's appointment.

It is one of your great and permanent consolations that God orders every thing concerning you, both as it relates to your condition in this world, and to your condition in the world to come. This is a consolation, because you know Him to be both able and willing to do for you all that is best for your real and eternal welfare. And even when your lot is most discouraging and distressful, you are sure that all is well—that your interests are secure under his protection—and that the very disappointments and calamities which befall you will be so overruled by him, as not only to leave you uninjured, but even to promote your highest good. On this account, you are comforted, and you resign yourselves impli-

citly and cheerfully to his disposal. Now extend these views to the case of your waiting for Christ's second coming. That event is determined by him as to all its circumstances. It is a part of the plan which he has formed for your salvation. It originates in the same mercy which prompted him to give up his Son to suffering and to death for you. And does not every view of the divine perfections which you have been privileged to take, constrain you to acquiesce in all that has been fixed as to the second coming, as well as in all that took place with regard to the first coming of Christ? Very true, you are perplexed—you are harassed—you are tempted—you have little to attach you to a present scene—you would be happier by far, if you were away from it. But don't you recognise the hand of that God who bids you wait for the coming of his Son from heaven, in all that you now are, and in all that you now suffer? You cannot doubt his power to translate you immediately where you desire to be. But you can as little doubt the wisdom and the goodness which keeps you here. Since you *are* kept here, you may be assured that the delay is dictated by love, and that it is calculated to subserve your highest interests. He who has been so gracious as to make you heirs of future glory, cannot fail to bring you to that inheritance as soon as all things are ready—as soon as it is best for *you*, and most consistent with his own

sovereign and beneficent purposes. And sooner than that, neither gratitude for his gifts nor confidence in his dealings, will permit you to wish for the second coming of your Lord. Unbelief may sometimes suggest, and the pressure of affliction may urge the question, "Why should we be any longer detained from that meeting with the Saviour, which is to be the termination of all our sorrows, and the consummation of all our joys?" But let your faith take a firm hold of the absolute perfection which reigns in the divine character—think of the redemption which God has wrought out for you, of whose blessings you have already tasted, and of whose fulness you are hereafter to partake—consider the faithfulness of all the promises he has ever made to his people, and how much he will rejoice and be honoured by the fulfilment of them—remember your own ignorance of the treatment which it is necessary for you to undergo in your course of discipline and preparation for eternity—recollect that God alone is acquainted with the special connection that subsists between your present and your future state, that he alone can determine what you must do, how much you must suffer, and how long you must wait, before you can enter into his kingdom; that he alone can bring to pass all those great things which are promised respecting your final deliverance from the evils of mortality, and your final attainment of the blessings of an end-

less life—let it be deeply impressed upon your minds, that as he has prepared for you all the blessedness which is to be revealed at the second coming of Christ, so he is now training you up for the participation of it, and that the kindness which made it yours by a blood-bought title, can have no other end to serve by keeping it still as an object of desire and anticipation, than that you may reach it more certainly, and enjoy it more richly :—And under the influence of all these considerations, murmur not that your Lord delayeth his coming, and that in consequence of this you are exposed to many ills and hardships ; but let your waiting for that event be a patient waiting, and along with your heartfelt desire for it, resign yourselves to the good pleasure of him who will neither be unfaithful nor slack concerning the promise that he has made of sending his Son to take you to that place of spotless purity, and unspeakable joy, which he had formerly sent the same divine messenger to purchase and procure for you by his obedience unto death.

2. In the *second* place, you should wait for Christ's second coming with patience, because it is conducive to your own improvement and advantage.

The present is a scene of preparation for the future. It is on earth that you are to become meet for heaven. What you do aye and until Christ appears is to make you ready for his ap-

pearance, when that actually takes place. No doubt the moment that you are justified by the grace of God, and regenerated by his Spirit,—that moment you can be made an inhabitant of the celestial world, for then the two great barriers to your admission, want of title and want of fitness, are taken away, and if it so pleased God, it would be consistent with all his perfections, and with the whole scheme of man's redemption, that without any delay, you should be with your Lord in paradise. Instances of this kind have happened. But the general fact is, that after believers have been pardoned and converted, they are retained, for a longer or a shorter period, in a present world, and have a certain work assigned them, and are subjected to a certain course of discipline,—all which must be finished before either mercy or wisdom would suggest their removal. There is a correspondence between what you are here and what you are to be hereafter, not only as it respects the general or essential principle of a change having been effected in your spiritual state and character, but also as it respects the strength of those dispositions which were implanted in you when you became new creatures, and the extent of those attainments in faith and holiness which you may have made in the progress of sanctification. So that of two believers one may be riper for glory than another; and of the same believer it may be true

that he is not so ready now for entering into his rest, as he will be at some future stage of his pilgrimage. The servant whose pound, by a faithful and diligent occupation of it, had gained ten pounds, had an authority given him over ten cities; while he whose pound had gained but five pounds, was made ruler over no more than five cities. And in the visions of John, when one of the elders asked him respecting the martyrs to the truth, who seemed to enjoy a peculiar distinction in heaven, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"—this explanation was given by himself to the wondering Apostle, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple."

When, therefore, my Christian friends, you are in those circumstances which tempt you to wish for an earlier release than God seems willing to grant you, and to say respecting the advent of the Saviour, "Why are his chariot wheels so long in coming?" you should remember that, under that wise and gracious dispensation to which you are indebted for all your hopes, these very circumstances are most materially connected—they are identified as it were, with your final and triumphant introduction into the regions of immortality. You may have many pain-

ful and laborious duties to perform, which you would gladly exchange for the more delightful services of the upper sanctuary,—you may be exposed to a multitude of powerful and ceaseless temptations, from which you long for the deliverance and the security which can only be found in that holy place where nothing that defileth shall ever enter,—numerous distresses of mind and body and outward estate may be visiting you with their wearisome days and their sleepless nights—and through the vista of onward life, as far as your hopes or your conjectures can reach, you may descry nothing but the bitterness of sorrow and the gloom of desolation, and amidst these cruel and crushing evils, you may feel your hearts mutinying against the hand that sends them, and be ready to cry out in the language of unqualified and unsubmissive desire, “O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest.” But remember amidst all your difficulties and amidst all your anguish, that whatever you have to do, and whatever you have to suffer in the wilderness, is linked by indissoluble ties to what you are to be, and to what you are to enjoy, in the promised land. Every thing that is now appointed you, is appointed by him who loved you, and redeemed you from your sins, and pledged his faithful word that he would bring you at length to his holy and heavenly kingdom, and the appointment is intended to compensate disadvantages which exist

in your natural endowments, or in your external condition, to correct certain failings which might have marred and retarded your advancement, to mature particular graces which would otherwise have remained in a state of greater weakness and imperfection, and in short to model and prepare you for that place in the temple that is above, to which you have been predestinated and called, in the exercise of his saving and sovereign grace. Every temptation that you successfully resist,—every obligation that you faithfully fulfil,—every trial to which you patiently submit,—every step that you advance in the career of godliness and virtue,—every victory that you achieve over the devil, the world and the flesh, by that faith and patience which characterize the saints of God upon earth,—will put a loftier note in your song of praise, and add another gem to your crown of righteousness and glory in heaven.

Seeing then that your continued stay in this distant and dreary clime is essential or conducive to your own everlasting benefit, let not your souls be cast down, and let not their desires for deliverance overstep the limits of devout resignation to the will of him who has arranged your lot in this world with a view to your destiny beyond it, and whose redeeming mercy will lead him to make all things work together for your good. But “be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.” Not only will your trials and

sorrows and duties be overruled to produce more of that meetness for heaven, which it should be your first and paramount object to possess,—but your Saviour may arrive sooner than you expect,—at all events the day of your redemption cannot be far distant,—every hour that you toil and suffer brings it nearer ; and when it comes, it comes fraught with the perfection of that purity and the fulness of that joy after which your souls are now hungering and thirsting with imperishable desire. “ Be patient, therefore, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient ; stablish your hearts ; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

3. Finally, wait with patience for Christ’s second coming, for the sake of your brethren and fellow-men.

This was one of Paul’s motives, when amidst his longings to depart and to be with Christ, he was still contented to remain where the great head of the church had ordained him to labour. “ Nevertheless,” said he, “ to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” And this is the sentiment which will actuate all believers, however inferior they may be to the Apostle, in their sphere of activity, or in their powers and opportunities of

being useful. No man liveth to himself. He is connected with those around him by many ties. And who is there so obscure, so indigent, so solitary, so destitute of the gifts of the understanding, or of the graces of Christianity, or of occasions of doing good to others, as not to be able to accomplish something in behalf of his fellow-creatures? Now this something, whatever it be, it must be your concern to effect; and while Christ defers his advent, though you would no doubt esteem it far better, yet he is thereby lengthening out your day of usefulness and of service to mankind, and calling upon you to improve it in the efforts of philanthropy and love. And surely a sense of duty, in obedience to the divine command, gratitude to Him who died not for salvation to you only, but for salvation to all the ends of the earth, and that tender compassion for every individual of the species, which your experience of God's compassion must necessarily create,—all unite to prevent you from grudging a little longer stay in this toilsome and sorrowful abode, that you may work for the benefit of all who, whether kindred or strangers, stand in need of your interposition or your aid. Whether it is given you to believe, or to act, or to suffer, still be patient, and rejoice that while you are allowed thus to carry on your own improvement you are also privileged to add to the comfort and the well being of those who are cast

upon your care. The very circumstances which provoke you to complain of Christ's putting off his second coming are the very circumstances which enable you to promote the best interests of your neighbours or your friends. When you overcome the allurements by which he would have seduced you from your faith or your integrity, you give encouragement to such as might have despaired of the success of resistance, and lead them to make the efforts, and to supplicate the aid, by which they also may become conquerors in the hour of trial. A steady and thorough-going performance of the duties which you feared might be an overmatch for your resolution and your strength, will satisfy such as were shrinking from the high and arduous eminences of Christian virtue, that all these things are possible and practicable to him who believeth, and thus embolden them to attempt and to persevere, when, but for your example, they might have been disheartened and have fallen away. And when men see you magnanimously bearing those misfortunes and calamities which had sickened you at the earth, and made you wish to be sooner in heaven than your appointed time—when they see you persecuted because you adhere to the faith and obedience of the Gospel, and yet forgiving and blessing and praying for those by whom you are thus cruelly and despitefully used—when they see you reduced from opulence, to

all the hardships and all the scorn of unmitigated poverty, and yet eating your crust of bread, and drinking your cup of water, and shivering in your cheerless hut, with unfaltering trust in the power and providence of God—when they see you deprived by death of the beloved partner of your bosom, of the watchful and affectionate guardian of your helpless years, of the sweetest, and loveliest, and most accomplished of your offspring, and yet devoting to God more submissively than ever, that heart which he has well nigh broken, and kissing the rod with which he has smitten you to the very dust ;—when they behold you thus suffering and thus resigned, they learn from you a lesson which it is difficult to understand, and still more difficult to practise, and are animated to endure whatsoever is laid upon them with that cheerful acquiescence in the will of God, and that confident hope of his unsuffering kingdom, of which you have exhibited the operation and the effect in your more heavy and multiplied afflictions.

Let these considerations lead and determine you to exercise patience in waiting for the second coming of Christ, while you continue in this vale of tears. It will comfort you amidst all your troubles, that while they are sanctified for your own improvement, they are also blessed for the spiritual and immortal interests of those who witness your conduct. And when your Saviour

does come, not only will all that your are now doomed to bear, receive from him a gracious and a glorious recompense, but your reward will be enhanced by mingling with those spirits of the just made perfect, to whose faith, and comfort, and attainments, you had here been honoured to contribute, even when you were forsaken of all earthly joys, and borne down by the weight of accumulated and unrelieved adversities.

APPENDIX.

Note A, p. 138.

A FULL assurance of faith may respect the testimony of God to Christ, or it may refer to Christ as received and trusted in for salvation, or it may mean that the believer has an unflinching conviction and feeling of his own personal safety as a child of God. This last mentioned assurance, it appears to me, follows our reception of Christ as an all sufficient Saviour, just as our reception of Christ follows the credit that we give to God's testimony respecting him. It is an inference from saving faith, and not to be identified with saving faith itself. I am told in Scripture, that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved; but I am not told in Scripture—it is no part of revelation, that I am to be saved. The offer of salvation is made to me, as it is made to every sinner. Neither I nor any one else, however, can appropriate the salvation, unless there be faith in him by whom the salvation has been wrought out, and to believers in whom alone, it is promised or can be conveyed. All this is to my understanding as clear as any proposition in Christianity. And, therefore, I cannot but regard the mixing up of the full assurance of a personal interest in Christ's redemption with the faith which takes and relies upon Christ as he is presented in the Gospel, to be a violation of sound reasoning and a misinterpretation of Scripture doctrine.

I do not say that a man may not have full assurance of faith, as to his personal safety, the very moment after he is satisfied in his own mind that he believes in Christ; and I do not say that even then his assurance may not be united with the faith to which eternal life is annexed, so that were he to die immediately, his admission.

into heaven would take place, and prove that his assurance had been justified in fact. But he cannot warrantably have any certain feelings as to his safety unless he be conscious of believing—though the mind is so accustomed to processes of this kind that it is not necessary for him to sit down and set the case before his own observation in the form of a regular syllogism—deliberately weighing the truth of the premises, and then as deliberately studying the legitimacy of the connection between the premises and the conclusion. And considering that saving faith in Christ is inseparably connected with the process of regeneration, and is itself the master principle of holiness, I should deem it altogether absurd to maintain that he was as much entitled to cherish a full assurance at the period alluded to as he is entitled to do so after such an experience as will demonstrate evidently to himself and to all around him, that a moral change had actually taken place, and that divine grace had brought him “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Could I bring myself to admit this, I should be obliged to set at nought the most approved maxims and the best established deductions that have a place in the philosophy of human character, and to discard all those declarations and precepts of the Bible which speak of the necessity of self-examination as to our own spiritual state, and of the test by which we are to judge of the spiritual state of others, and which are both numerous and explicit.

Were I visiting an impenitent sinner on his deathbed, I should in faithfulness and compassion offer Christ to him, in the name of God, as a mighty and a willing Redeemer to all who believe in him. And I should feel myself called upon to represent the necessity of his believing in Christ for his own deliverance, both from the curse of the law and from the bondage of corruption; and were I to see his mind, even at the last hour, giving way to the message which I had taught him, and were I to hear him renouncing the refuges of lies in which he had hitherto trusted, and declaring his implicit reliance on God’s revealed mercy and on Christ’s meritorious obedience, and casting himself entirely upon the finished work of the Saviour, and expressing in strong language his assurance and his comfort and his glad anticipations of heaven, I should not feel myself at liberty to put a negative either on his confidence or his joy. I see nothing here inconsistent with the truths of the Gospel, or beyond the achievement of that power to which every instance of

salvation must be ascribed. I may have been privileged to witness a signal and striking triumph of divine grace, and I cannot discourage the hope which rises within me, that a soul has been snatched from destruction and translated into glory.

But am I therefore to forget, that the individual whose case I have been supposing, has had no time and no opportunity for manifesting that renewal of the heart without which he could not go into God's celestial presence, or for proving the reality and genuineness of that faith which, while it was the necessary instrument of his justification, was equally essential as the spring and principle of all acceptable submission to the divine will,—am I to forget all this in the consideration of every other case of conversion, apparent or real, and to treat all to whom I deliver the message of reconciliation, as if it were the same thing whether they were on the brink of eternity, or were to be favoured with a prolonged residence in this scene of trial, and of duty, and of preparation? Am I to leave them satisfied with an assurance, however full and strong, of their being in a state of salvation, and to be continually inculcating upon them the encouragement of that feeling as the grand secret both of holiness and of consolation, and to neglect those practical tests of an inward spiritual change, which reason itself would dictate as highly expedient at least, if not absolutely requisite, and to throw away as useless all the Scriptures, which teach us to be anxious about the well-being of our souls and the possession of saving graces, while they prescribe the means by which these are to be satisfactorily ascertained? I can conceive nothing more foolish or more dangerous. There is not only no authority given to us to say to any one, "If you have no doubt of your personal salvation then you are a child of God," but were I to hold such language I might be a minister of sin, of delusion, and of death. My warrant bids me say, "If you truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the divine word for it that you shall never perish but have everlasting life; and having true faith in Christ, you may be fully assured that the salvation which he proffers is yours, and therefore you may be glad in the Lord. But this is a matter of the deepest concern; the deceitfulness of your heart is one reason why a Redeemer is so necessary for you; you are subject to many deceptive influences from within and from without; you cannot be too careful and assiduous in ascertaining the truth of your spiritual condition, and therefore submit yourselves to the guidance and di-

rection of that same Spirit who leads the sinner to Christ, and works faith in him, and fills him with the peace of believing. You believe: 'Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith.'—'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.' Now are you born of God?—Remember that 'whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world;' Have you overcome the world?—'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;' Do you commit sin?—'Whosoever is born of God doeth righteousness;' Are you righteous?—If you are a child of God, you will love God, you will honour him, you will obey him, you will delight to hold communion with him. Are you characterized by these graces and attainments? &c. &c. &c."

It has always occurred to me as somewhat strange that the first Epistle of John should be the strong hold of those on whose opinions I am animadverting. For it seems to be the great object of the Apostle to guard his readers against the delusion of making a speculative belief and a religious profession the ground of confidence and hope. He does, indeed, speak of an unwavering faith as a privilege of the true Christian. But at the same time it is abundantly plain, that the principal design of what he says is to enforce the necessity of practical godliness and purity, and to hold out these as the surest attestations to our being "God's children by faith in Christ," and as our safest, though not our only warrants, for entertaining confidence, as standing in that happy relation to him.

Does it never occur to the advocates for unqualified assurance, that those who possess that feeling may be guilty of backsliding, while the feeling remains entire? Or have they never met with instances of this, even among the persons whom they have regarded as the best examples of the truth and efficacy of the doctrine? Or have they never witnessed cases where that doctrine, though fully realized, was accompanied with much ignorance and many imperfections, which in all probability would not have long existed, except for its paralyzing and self-satisfying influence? And who does not see that the grand remedy for such evils is a habitual inspection and examination of those moral evidences, which alone can demonstrate and put beyond doubt the reality of faith and the operations of grace,—a method of treating the subject which reason would prescribe, even while admitting the doctrine of full assurance, and which our Saviour and his Apostles uniformly adopted, not only by direct exhortation and explicit maxims to that purpose, but by minute de-

tails of duty which must find a place in every Christian character, and whose existence cannot be ascertained, without such a self-searching process, and such an application of practical tests, as those we are contending for.

To confine the attention of a sinner, when we address him with a view to his conversion, to the tenet of the full assurance of faith,—to have it as our grand object that such a sentiment may be excited and established in his mind,—to make it the beginning, the middle, and the end of all our dealings with him, that he shall master this attainment,—to dwell upon it as if there were nothing else in the work which we are striving to accomplish in him,—and to say little or nothing of the evil and the perils of sin, of the necessity of regeneration, of the risk and the ruin of self-deception, of the effects on temper and deportment which a saving belief in Christianity immediately produces, of the tendency to rest in speculation and feeling, and of other collateral topics—to act in this manner when aiming at the conversion of a sinner, is, in my opinion, to practise a delusion to which it is wonderful that any man, who reads and understands the Scripture account of salvation, can ever reconcile himself. And equally absurd and hazardous is it to go to the man who, having got the full assurance which was deemed so necessary for him, has yet relapsed, in spite of it, into his former immoralities, and instead of charging him with the aggravated wickedness of his conduct, and urging upon him a deep and thorough repentance, and pleading with him to look into the depravity of his heart and the guiltiness of his conduct, that he may make renewed application to the blood of atonement and to the grace of the Spirit,—to tell him that he has fallen back because he had not been careful to maintain an unwavering confidence in the certainty of his own personal salvation, and that his only refuge is to be found in a resumption of that confidence, and in the rejection and banishment of all the doubts which he had allowed to weaken its strength, and to impair his comfort and his joy. Wherever this plan of winning souls to Christ, and of building them up in their most holy faith, has been learnt, I must say that I can see no authority for it in the Bible. And however much in some particular instances it may have been attended with good consequences, even in these instances it has been rather the incidental occasion than the direct cause of the good that has been produced; and we shall discover its legitimate fruits in the opinionativeness and the self-sufficiency, the carnal se-

curity, and the other Pharisaical characters, of those who have been taught to regard it as the grand secret for making Christians.

This subject admits of a more detailed illustration. But I must content myself at present with these few cursory remarks. And I would conclude with observing, that here, as in other things, the erroneous views with which we are presented by good men originate in partial views of the Gospel. Instead of taking a comprehensive and connected survey of the scheme unfolded in the Bible, they select a single corner of it : upon that they found a theory ; and this theory so engrosses their thoughts and their attachment, that they either attend to nothing else, or make every thing else subservient to its support—so that amidst all that variety which Christianity exhibits, they can discover nothing but what helps to build up or to beautify their favourite speculation. Would they but deal with Christianity in all the largeness in which God has revealed it in his word, they might have less scope for ingenuity, and there might be less novelty in what they had to propound, but the cause of divine truth and vital godliness would be much promoted. As to the particular topic we have been considering, it will be seen by a full consideration of what the inspired volume contains respecting it, that if great stress is laid on the virtue of an assured faith, there is a corresponding importance attached to the holy fruits of that faith, as an evidence of its existence and its energy—and that to omit from our estimate of Christian character any one of these, or any of the points either in principle, or in feeling, or in practice, that are connected with them, is so far to impair or to endanger the superstructure which we are taught to build on Jesus Christ, as the great and only foundation.

I beg to quote from the standards of our national Church two or three passages, as giving a brief statement of what I deem the doctrine of Scripture on the question at issue. “ Such as truly believe in Christ, and *endeavour to walk in all good conscience before him*, may without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God’s promises, and by the spirit enabling them to *discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made*, and bearing witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God, be infallibly assured that they are in the state of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation.” (Larger Catechism, Quest. 80.) Assurance of grace and salvation, not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they ob-

tain it; and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, sins, temptations, and desertions; yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them from sinking into utter despair." (Do. Quest. 81.) "These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and *by them* believers manifest their thankfulness, *strengthen their assurance*, &c. (Conf. of Faith, cxvi. 2.) "Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may *vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and estate of salvation*; which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and *love him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before him*, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed." (Do. cxviii. 1.)

NOTE B. p. 393.

I have no hesitation in professing myself an advocate for the immediate emancipation of slaves.

In maintaining the propriety and justice of such a measure, I will not enter the lists with men who, professing to be more enlightened than their fellows on all points of theology, and dogmatising with more than the confidence of Apostles, can bravely defend slavery as a right thing—not to be condemned and abolished—but rather to be tolerated, countenanced, continued—merely because they are pleased to call it a type of the subjection which is due to Christ from his people, and as a great ordinance of God for preaching that subjection to the church. I will not argue with men, however eloquent and however good, who will palm upon me such an absurd and unscriptural *dictum*, and because I refuse to take it as Gospel, on authority no better than human, will denounce me as one of those who are "in a state of profound ignorance and rebellious feeling." I will not argue with men who can gravely and dictatorially speak of a slave-holder as "the standing type over all the world of Christ, the Lord both of the election and the reprobation," and of the poor slaves as standing types over all the

world of the reprobation, while those who serve the same master but are free, are standing types of the election. I will not, I cannot argue with men who can indulge in such raving, and not only demand a hearing for it as if it were sober sense, but insist upon our unreserved adoption of it, under the penalty of being found utterly unacquainted with the Bible, and guilty of joining in insurrection against God. Rather than argue with such men, I would encounter the most bigotted slave-driver in the West Indies, who founds not his creed upon his own infallible interpretation of the infallible oracles of divine mercy, but upon views which faith in these oracles may at once and altogether subvert, or which may undergo a beneficial change by deeper consideration and more lengthened experience. With neither class, however, would I be very willing to engage in dispute, seeing that with neither would it be easy to agree in any common ground where we might stand and reason, or, rather, seeing that they and I differ *toto cælo* as to the essential nature and demerit of slavery. I am to be understood as proceeding on the principle contended for in the discourse to which this note is affixed, viz. that slavery is condemned by religion, or, in other words, is immoral, and upon that principle I plead for the immediate and total abolition of slavery.

This doctrine may be successfully maintained even on the grounds of expediency. If a fair balance were struck between the evils of instantly putting an end to the system, and the evils of its continuance till the slaves are prepared for the safe and useful enjoyment of liberty, I have no doubt that the latter would greatly preponderate. The idleness, the anarchy, the outrages on person and property which, as it is alleged, would necessarily accompany a sudden restoration to freedom, could not long continue, and would have a tendency to work their own remedy: and what are these, when compared to the multiplied hardships, insults, oppressions, and sufferings which so many human beings must be doomed to undergo, on the other supposition, for an indefinite period of time—necessarily by the confession of our opponents, for many, many years, and, so far as I am able to judge of their mode of reasoning, for centuries to come, or for ever? The idea of insurrection is very horrible, and operates powerfully on the imagination; but to a mind that reflects calmly and meditates deeply on the subject, it is not half so distressing as the idea of all the misery that the poor unprotected and unpitied victims of a cruel bondage must endure in silence, or be ob-

ligned to suffer with wanton aggravations if they shall dare to resist or to complain—a misery too, of which those on whom it is inflicted can foresee no end but death, and which must even descend from generation to generation. In the one case there is the hurricane, which produces many wrecks and much desolation, but which is soon over, and having purified the air from sickly vapours, as a compensation for its mischiefs, is succeeded by renovated health, and vigorous effort, and renewed prosperity. In the other case, there is the pestilential atmosphere which, with its tranquil but not less destructive influence, spreads languishing and disease and death throughout all the habitations of the land, which enfeebles the arm of industry and interdicts the comforts of life, which diffuses a curse that no skill can avert and no benevolence mitigate, and which the stillness that attends it only renders the more deadly in its effects, and the more permanent in its duration.

If it be true, as the advocates for gradual abolition affirm, that the slaves are not prepared for the freedom to which it is proposed ultimately to restore them, this furnishes an argument much stronger on our side of the question than on theirs. For to what is the alleged want of preparation to be ascribed? Either to the treatment which the slaves have actually received, or to the nature of the system itself under which they have been placed. On the former supposition, the masters are represented as so regardless of what is due to the moral cultivation of their slaves, so guilty of a course of oppression towards them, so little careful to gain their respect and esteem, that the slaves would refuse to work for their own maintenance, or they would gratify their passions by violence and plunder. According to the accounts given of these masters, they are with few exceptions, of the very best description, and not in the least behind the wisest and humanest of the same class in our own country. And yet they have continued to keep their slaves in this state of ignorance, and barbarism, and unfitness for liberty, when they could not fail to be sensible that it was the great cause of preventing the measure of emancipation from being carried, and when it constituted the principal argument which was employed against it by themselves and their friends! Surely to wait till persons who have hitherto been so negligent of what was their obvious duty, and who are clearly interested in never performing that duty effectually, shall train their slaves for the complete liberation which they are said to be unqualified to enjoy, is to manifest a de-

gree of simplicity which every man of common understanding would blush to own. The masters have never yet been persuaded—and they cannot be compelled—to prepare their slaves for freedom; yet it is under their management that this preparation must be effected; and therefore, the case may be fairly considered as hopeless. On the other supposition, the conclusion is still stronger and more indisputable. If the system has wrought such degradation in the principles, and feelings, and character of those who have been subjected to it, that they cannot be trusted with the exercise of liberty; and if it has produced this effect upon them in spite of the boasted humanity, and in spite of the interested motives, by which we have been told all such evils are necessarily prevented, whence arises the expectation, that at any future period it will have a different influence and an opposite result? The unfitness for emancipation originating in the very nature and operation of slavery, it is a contradiction and absurdity to say that the slavery and the unfitness can ever be disjoined. It is an irresistible inference from such a proposition, that a slave can never be qualified for the deliverance which is desiderated, and therefore that he never can be made free.

I do not deny, however, that the system of slavery, which exists in our West India colonies, may be amended—that many of its harsher features may be softened down—that some of its more detestable accompaniments may be removed—and that altogether it may be made to assume a milder and less revolting aspect. But from this I cannot help anticipating more evil than good. Whenever such an amelioration is accomplished, that argument which affects nine-tenths of your men of benevolence and expediency is incalculably weakened; the most formidable objections to what we are desirous to abolish are nearly removed; and the country ceases to feel any deep concern in the cause which has long excited their keenest sympathies, and still calls forth their liveliest indignation. And the moment that the community at large grow passive or lukewarm on the subject, the process of gradual abolition that was going on stops; the friends of slavery are not asked to make any farther concession, or they meet the demand for them, with an exhibition of the improvements that have been made, and of the happiness that reigns: the inherent virulence of the system still works with power, though in secret; the best regulations are evaded; abuses and corruptions spring up where they were thought to have been eradi-

cated ; the law by degrees becomes a dead letter ; avarice, and passion, and lust, and cruelty regain their former ascendancy ; and it requires a new and a mightier effort to rouse either the legislature or the people to reconsider a subject which had been thrust upon their attention, till they were almost sick of it, and to re-enact the statutes and impose the restraints which had promised so much, and effected so little, in behalf of the oppressed negroes.

In this view I have always lamented the tone of satisfaction with which any legislative measure was hailed, as contributing to the protection or comfort of the slaves. Every step of this kind has appeared to me a retrogressive movement. Each successive boon, as it is insultingly called, which has been conferred on the enslaved Africans, has only served to put off the consummation of our wishes to a more distant period. The principle of expediency, in this case, seems to defeat itself. And all that it suggests for attaining the end in view, goes to make that attainment more distant and more hopeless—a better illustration of which need not be sought for, than what is actually found in the recent history of the question—the partial enactments for amendment in the system being for the most part resisted and thwarted by the very men, who must necessarily have the greatest share in preparing for the ultimate abolition of it, and having very little other effect than that of providing an argument for its perpetuity, by giving some colour to the allegation that things are so much more tolerable than they once were, as not to justify any violent outcry, or any serious alarm, among the friends of humanity.

But instead of enlarging farther on the ground of expediency as supporting immediate abolition, I would found my pleading for that measure on the principles of moral justice, or religious obligation. I do not contend with those who maintain that slavery is not a violation of these principles. But on those who acknowledge that it is, I would urge the inconsistency of their conduct in still ranking themselves along with the gradual abolitionists, and I cannot but express my surprise that so many of them should fall into this inconsistency. I address myself to those who profess to be Christians, and to take their maxims and rules of conduct from the Bible, and I ask them whether they believe that slavery implies *sin* on the part of those who impose it on their fellow-creatures ? If they answer in the negative, I say again, that with such I am not at present expostulating or reasoning. But if they answer in the affirmative,

and allow that moral guilt attaches to the system of slavery, then I would have them to explain the grounds on which they would justify perseverance in that system, or defend themselves for giving it their countenance and support? Were we consulting about the propriety of terminating any commercial or political arrangement there might be doubts entertained as to the thing itself being attempted at all, or as to the best period for accomplishing it; fact might be set against fact, and argument against argument, and such calculations might be employed on either side as had no reference to the Bible or the Decalogue, and the whole matter might be settled the one way or the other without sacrificing a single precept of the divine law. The moment, however, that a transgression of the divine law, or, in one word, sin, is confessed to characterize any action, whether it be the action of individuals or of nations, that moment all worldly or secular reasoning is precluded; no question of pecuniary loss or gain is admissible; a slow or reluctant abandonment of what God forbids is nothing better than continued rebellion against him; and the only course for a good and pious mind to pursue is an instant, and total, and uncompromising renunciation of the practice or the deed, with whatever inconveniences and with whatever losses the renunciation may be attended.

This is the rule of Scripture; and applying this rule to the subject under consideration, I think myself entitled to say, that when men allow that slavery is essentially sinful, and yet maintain that it should be abolished by degrees, they are guilty of something which is very like a contradiction in terms. For if it be of the essence of sin, that it is contrary to God's sovereign will, and that it should be abstained from or forsaken just because it is so, then to persist in it deliberately, whether with the view of ultimately deserting it or not, is tantamount to saying that there is no objection to it, or it is a practical denial of the very statement upon which the resolution to desert sin was taken. Slavery is not sinful to-day, and lawful or virtuous to-morrow. It is intrinsically, and thoroughly, and for ever sinful,—it is so, unless God, the arbiter of man's life, and of his freedom, and of his all, has specially appointed and sanctioned it. And, therefore, to go on indulging in it, under any pretext whatever, is nothing less than to set up our own views in opposition to the authority of the great Governor of the universe.

To what purpose is it to say, or what worth or truth is there in the plea, that an instantaneous conclusion to the slave system would be

productive of many serious and extensive mischiefs? Has God any where said that the fear of these will confer on us a right to violate his law? Or does he permit us to put sin into the one scale and advantage into the other, and to decide, in the character of his accountable creatures, according as either preponderates? Is there any rule by which we can compare the one thing with the other? Can disobedience to God be legalised by the gain of the whole world? Or does not Christianity breathe throughout its whole system the spirit of the heathen maxim, which stands as a reproach against many a professing Christian, "*Fiat justitia, ruat cœlum?*" If hurtful effects on the one hand, or beneficial effects on the other, are to regulate our judgments in cases of this kind, then I might argue from that very thing against the mode of judging which the gradual emancipationists have perpetual recourse to. For if it holds good as to slavery, acknowledged to be immoral, it will hold good as to every other species of immorality, and will thus put every commandment of God's law at the mercy of corrupt affection, and arithmetical calculation, and political economy, and substitute secular interest in the room of moral obligation, as the arbiter and judge of human conduct.

But I reject such a mode of settling the question altogether. I confine myself entirely to the path pointed out by the statutes of Heaven; and if I am satisfied that these forbid slavery, I conclude, without any reference to the detriment that may be sustained, or to the profit that may be secured, that slavery must be put an end to, and for the very same substantial and imperative reason, that it must be put an end to without delay,—every day's procrastination only adding to the guilt of those who indulge in it, and setting at defiance the very first principles and maxims on which a true Christian feels himself constrained to act.

In reply to all this, I may be asked, if I consider every man who keeps his fellow-men in slavery unworthy of the name of Christian? I answer, No. I give this answer, however, only because I charitably presume that those who give other proofs of their Christianity, are not yet enlightened so far as to embrace the views which I am enforcing; that they are influenced by prejudice, by ignorance, or by some other unhappy bias, and that they cannot be expected to walk under the government of convictions which have not yet got a footing in their minds. On the supposition that they have a distinct perception of the sinfulness of slavery, independently of its effects or of its accompaniments, I cannot see for my part

how they can hold slave-property as they hold other property, or how they can sell slaves on any condition, or how they can buy slaves except for the purpose of redeeming them from bondage. With the doctrine that I entertain on this topic, I could no more do these things, and keep a good conscience, than I could commit any act whatever which I believe to be forbidden by the Divine authority. And I have no doubt, that if the Christian proprietors of slaves would examine the subject purely and disinterestedly as in the sight of God, and as tried by his law, they would look upon all the worldly gains which such property secures for them as nothing better than the wages of iniquity, and as loaded with a curse which all the protection of the British Legislature can neither lighten nor remove. And I have as little doubt, that if they could be brought to sacrifice their filthy lucre to the cause of truth, justice, and mercy; and if the Christians of this empire could be brought to join them by adopting the moral view of the question, and maintaining it without any deference to the claims of mere utility or expediency, we should soon witness the annihilation of that great evil, whose existence so many affect to deplore, as most unchristian and immoral, but which so many are willing to suffer for an indefinite period, all immoral and all unchristian as it is.

Let it not be said that I am indifferent to the consequences of immediate emancipation. I am indeed indifferent to them—I despise them wholly, as put into competition with the demands which are made by outraged humanity, for justice and disenthralment. If that be the state of the question, I have no hesitation in saying, let moral rectitude triumph—let God's will be done—let man be free,—even though all our colonies should be the price of such a consummation. And let those who, by their cupidity, their cruelty and their obstinacy, have made the price so high, bear all the guilt and all the ignominy of it. But I see no necessity for bringing the matter of dispute to this crisis. Those who hold the opinions which I advocate, are not indifferent to the consequences of the measure proposed. Were we so, we should fall into the same error, and deserve the same condemnation, that we deem attachable to our opponents. We grant, that Parliament must anticipate as accurately as possible, and make as ample provision as possible against the evils, both natural and moral, which may result from immediate abolition. In the same act which pronounces the negroes free, at least pledge the Legislature, and even proceed so far, to secure the well-being

of the slaves, the safety of the masters, the interest of all concerned. I see no objection to entertain the question of compensation; though I must claim the benefits of it in the first place, and above all, to the poor slaves who have suffered wrongs which all the treasures of the empire cannot repair, and protest against the extravagant demands that are made in behalf of the proprietors, and made evidently with the view of demonstrating the measure to be impracticable, and inducing us to give an indefinite prolongation, or which is the same thing, absolute perpetuity to the system which we seek to destroy. It appears to me that all this is satisfactorily settled by taking the moral view of the subject—by taking it strictly and firmly—and by giving it an ascendancy over all the proceedings which from first to last may be adopted. If we can agree at once, and on the lofty principle of right and justice, to deliver the slaves from their bondage, there is in this very thing a security for acting rightly and justly in all the subordinate details and subsequent arrangements: whereas if we allow the primary question, that of the slave's title to be emancipated, to be reduced to a question of pure profit and loss, and to be mixed up with the categories of when and how, we surrender the vantage ground on which we stood as Christians, and give to mammon that domination over truth and equity, which has been the great upholder of slavery from its very commencement down to the present hour.

Had my limits permitted me, I should have liked to glance at the proposal for abolishing slavery, by declaring that all who are born of slaves after a certain fixed period shall be accounted free—a proposal which makes a compromise between moral rectitude and mere expediency, for if it be right to make slaves of the innocent parents, it cannot be wrong to make slaves of their not more innocent offspring,—a proposal which interferes with slave property as directly as the proposal for individual emancipation does, it being obvious, that according to all acknowledged principle in such cases, the progeny of slaves are as much property as the slaves themselves, and the value of slaves depending much on their having or being likely to have children—a proposal, moreover, which contradicts one main reason for having emancipation gradual, since if the system of slavery is to continue with respect to the father and mother, by whom is it that the young are to be trained up, so as to be prepared for the safe and full enjoyment of liberty?

But I must not enlarge. I would conclude with observing, that I am

far from laying the whole guilt of our slave system at the door of our West India planters and proprietors. They have their share, and a large share it is. But they have peculiar temptations to lead them astray : they have been accustomed to associate the continuance of slavery with the preservation of their worldly fortunes ; and they may have a feeling of pride or of honour in resisting whatever would give countenance to the allegations of cruelty and oppression which have been, I doubt not in some cases unjustly, brought against them as reasons for depriving them of a power which they have so abused. But no such apologies can be found for the legislature of Great Britain, which has the enactment of that code of laws of which Christianity is said to be "part and parcel." Still less can such apologies be pleaded for those religious men in our country, who declaim continually against the influence of worldly considerations over human conduct, who form Societies and apply for acts of Parliament to put down delinquencies which disappear when placed beside the atrocities of the slave system, and who even go so far as to condemn the application of expediency to Christian practice in every department of life, as sinful and injurious in the extreme. And what a melancholy and instructive fact is it, that the Society for the propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts, incorporated by Royal Charter, and consisting entirely of members of the Established Church of England, have possessed slave property for more than a century, and yet that their slaves, by their own acknowledgment, have not been so educated and disciplined as to be fit for the enjoyment of liberty, that every negro child born on their estates is retained in bondage as much as were their imported negroes a hundred years ago, and that their system of management is marked by some of the very worst of those oppressions which prevail among those other proprietors to whom the *Propagation of the Gospel* is an object of hatred or of indifference, and which seem to be essentially characteristic of the slave system by whomsoever it is upheld and practised.

I do not wonder, however, at such inconsistencies in the opinions and doings of the professed Christians on this great question, when I recollect the self gratulations which they poured forth on the abolition of the slave trade, which were just as proper and seasonable as those might be that came from a band of robbers who had consented at length to become honest men. Alas ! they should ra-

ther have been clothed with humility and mourning, for having so long delayed to rescue the unoffending Africans from the mightiest evil that ever afflicted and disgraced humanity.

Note C, p. 404.

Whether Christ was *capable* of sinning, is a question which might have been safely left to the feeling and decision of every true believer, had not language been held by some that is calculated to mislead and to distress the Christian mind. A few remarks on that point, therefore, may not be irrelevant or useless.

The human nature of Christ was never corrupt. He took upon him our nature ; but our nature is not corrupt in its original state, it is only corrupt in its present state, and its deliverance from this corruption was the purpose of his incarnation. When he assumed our nature he was made flesh. This, however, was not sinful flesh ; it was nothing more than “the *likeness* of sinful flesh.” That he should have allied himself to *sinful* flesh, so that the divine nature and the sinful flesh constituted one person, even for a single moment, is not only contrary to all our ideas of the immaculate holiness of the Godhead, but destructive of the very purpose for which the mysterious union was effected. For how could a being that was naturally corrupt, in whatever department of his person the evil resided, ever make a satisfactory atonement for the moral corruption of other beings ? An atonement was necessary to take away his own sinfulness, and when, or where, or by whom was that atonement made for Christ’s human nature ? To say that his divine nature purified and consecrated his human nature as soon as the union of the two took place, is not only a gratuitous assertion, but still leaves the absurdity unremoved, that the sinful being can atone for his own sinfulness. The Son of God did not take to him a human body, such as is found every where among the children of men ; a body was prepared for him, and from the kind of preparation that took place, and the peculiar circumstances attending it, we are distinctly and emphatically taught to regard his body as thoroughly free from moral pollution. It was of the seed of Abraham or of the seed of Adam ; it had all the essential qualities of human nature, but none of the faculties infused into it which implied moral degeneracy. It possessed whatever was necessary for answering the

sacrificial uses to which it was destined in the economy of redemption, but that, instead of requiring the slightest taint of what constitutes our fallen character, just made the utter exclusion of every thing of this description altogether indispensable.

It is of no avail to say, that the infirmities, and pains, and sorrows which beset Christ during his humiliation, indicated his nature to be in the fallen state, or his flesh to be sinful flesh. All this is accounted for by the fact, that he not only took upon him our transgressions, or had them imputed to him, the moment that he assumed our nature, but that he assumed our nature for the express purpose of becoming a sacrifice or sin-offering. Whatever he suffered, or whatever species of abasement attached to him, from the instant of his conception to the instant of his dissolution, was the result of that peculiar office he sustained as a substitute for the ungodly who were given him to redeem. "All evil," indeed, was "his flesh," but it was natural evil, not inherently moral evil, and though there can be no natural evil which does not flow from moral evil, yet in the case of Christ, who represented his people before God by bearing their sins, the moral evil was in no respect and in no degree "his own;" it was theirs for whom he "humbled himself and became obedient unto the death of the cross," and being by his perfect sinlessness qualified to make atonement for them, he "suffered the *just* in place of the *unjust*, that he might bring them unto God."

Neither is it of any consequence to tell us, that unless Christ had been "sinful flesh," or had human nature in its "fallen state," and "all evil," the idea of temptation would have been unsuitable, and he who resisted it would have had, therefore, no real virtue. Had our first parents fallen when Satan tempted them to eat of the forbidden fruit? Or were the angels that are now reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day, in a fallen state when they committed the sin which brought them to their present miserable condition? And is there no holiness, no virtue in God himself, because he cannot be tempted of sin? Is not he described as altogether righteous? Is not he "glorious in holiness?" Is not he represented as on this account worthy of all praise? And are not we exhorted to be "followers of God as dear children," and to be "merciful and perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is merciful and perfect?"

No doubt it may be alleged, that if Christ had been essentially pure and quite invulnerable to the shafts of temptation, Satan

would not have tried him as he did in the wilderness, knowing, as he must have done, his innate and total impeccability. I do not pretend to be acquainted with the extent of Satan's knowledge in such cases; it is not revealed. But it is just as easy and safe to hold him ignorant of the point in question, as it is to hold him ignorant of the impossibility of Christ's *actually* yielding to his influence. And as to the matter of fact, it is of no moment whether Christ, when in our nature, was incapable of sinning, or whether he was prevented from sinning by a continued interposition and supply of divine influence. Satan could have as little difficulty in ascertaining the latter, as in ascertaining the former. The probability is, that he was equally unacquainted with both; and that seeing Christ in the form of fallen man—in the likeness of sinful flesh—he addressed various passions with the hope of frustrating the object for which he avowedly appeared in the world.

I marvel to see the inaccuracy of thinking which pervades what has been lately written on this topic, by the assertors of Christ's flesh being fallen or sinful. In illustration of the possibility of Christ's taking upon him the sinful nature without any violation of the Divine holiness, we are referred to the fact of the Spirit of God dwelling in those who are confessedly sinful, that he may purify and cleanse them, without any idea of being himself tainted and dishonoured by their moral corruption. But who does not see that the two cases are essentially and totally different? The Divine Spirit does not inhabit the believer, for the purpose of becoming one with him, and in that state of union which constitutes them one person, to effectuate the ends for which he was given. Whereas the Son of God so entered into human nature, or assumed human nature into such a connection with his Divine nature, as that the two became *one person*, and as that by this *one person* expiation was made for our guilt, and the other offices fulfilled, which are necessary to our complete redemption. Accordingly the Spirit dwells in every believer, that upon every believer he may operate with peculiar influence, and for the peculiar ends of his office. But the Son of God did not dwell in any individual of the species. The human nature which he assumed—the "true body and the reasonable soul" which he "took to himself," were not those of any man whatever. It was the human nature, as the representative of all men, which he entered into, and by his union with which, he became "God and man in one person," and

in that one person so conjoined, offered himself up for the sins of the world.

It will not do to say, as I have heard some allege, in vindication of the doctrine against which I contend, that the human nature which the Son of God took upon him was *originally* sinful flesh, but that it was purified from its sinfulness before it became a part of Christ Jesus, as God and man in one person. For not to repeat what has been already said about the peculiar mode in which the Scripture tells us that his flesh received its primary existence, it is clear that by introducing such an element into the case, the ground of difference between us and our opponents is removed, and their doctrine dwindles away into a mere useless theory. For if the human nature of Christ was at first fallen or sinful, but purified from sin before it became a constituent part of his person as God-man, then from the moment that he became the person who was to take away our guilt by the sacrifice of himself, his human nature was not fallen or sinful, but totally free from all the moral evil introduced by the fall, and so there is no room left for the dispute which has been engendered. And why in this case should we depart from the proposition which we are all agreed in maintaining, and go into the region of mere theory, where it is of no consequence whether we hold the one opinion or the other, as far as the union of the Divine and human nature in the person of our atoning sacrifice is concerned.

Without going through all the wild and fanciful notions of those with whom we are contending, I may only mention one, which amounts to this, that the Son of God dwelt in the human nature, "all evil," "sinful," "fallen," and exerted this power to accomplish its purification, operating mightily for that end, and finally succeeding in his purpose. This is altogether inconsistent with the doctrine contained in those church formularies which some of these gentlemen have discovered of late to be so sound and essential, that no parent is a real Christian who does not inculcate them on his children. For what says "The Shorter Catechism" of the Church of Scotland? "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in *two distinct natures*, and *one person*, for ever." And what says the "Confession of Faith" of the same Church? The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance,

and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon him *man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin*; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, *were inseparably joined together in one person*, without conversion, composition, or confusion: which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man." How does all this square with the idea of the divine nature of Christ dwelling within the human nature of Christ, as the Holy Spirit dwells within the believer? If the Son of God inhabited the man Christ Jesus according to the representation given above, we could no more call the two natures *one person*, than we could identify the mine in which a labourer is digging with the labourer himself, or the house which a man abides and works in, and whitewashes, with the man himself who is thus employed. The representation, in short, is utterly absurd!

The metaphysics of our antagonists are as bad as their theology. But what can be expected of those who are bold to maintain, that when Christ prayed in the garden, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" he was in his human nature, in his sinful flesh, rebelling against God; and who are ingenious enough to discover, that as a spiritual being could not properly create the material universe, therefore the work was assigned to Christ, who had a body as well as a spirit,—as if there was no power of common sense to put the question, Who, or what then, created Christ's body, which was itself material, and was not eternal?

It appears to me, that while, from the very nature of the case, and the very purpose to be answered by Christ's incarnation, it is impossible that his flesh could be considered as at any period "sinful" or "fallen" or "evil," so the Divine Spirit has been particularly careful to impress our minds through the medium of Scripture, with the doctrine of his perfect freedom from anything approaching to moral pravity, or weakness, or perversity, or to a capacity of disobeying God. The whole account given us of Christ seems intended to satisfy us to the full, that in all respects in which he can be viewed, he was completely "separated from sinners." When the Angel Gabriel conversed with the Virgin Mary, he "said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the

power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; *therefore* also that *holy thing* which shall be *born of thee*, shall be called the Son of God." Christ himself said, "the Prince of this world cometh, and hath *nothing* in me." And we are told that he was "without sin,"—that he "did no sin"—and that he "knew no sin." Could all this have been the case, if, at the same time it could be affirmed of him, that he was "in sinful flesh,"—that he "took human nature in the fallen and not in the unfallen state?"—that his "flesh was all evil, even as this fallen world was all evil?"

How deeply is it to be regretted that such a tenet is maintained by any influential divines—by those who are reputed and followed as "Masters in Israel!" And how distressing that it should be mentioned with a dogmatism which sets all argument, and, as I think, all Scripture at defiance! And how intolerable that we who stand up for the absolute sinlessness of the flesh of him who is "the Lord our righteousness, and the propitiation for our sins," should be talked of as on that account filling them "with horror and amazement," and denounced, moreover, as "theological babes of the religious world!" For my own part, I shall be content to stand and suffer this reproach for "the most catholic and orthodox doctrine" of the immaculate purity of Christ's human nature, and glory in being called a "theological babe," since that denomination is affixed to me because, for the honour of my Redeemer, and the salvation of my own soul, I consider Christ as, in the strictest sense of the terms, and in every department of his person, and in all stages of his existence, God's *holy* child Jesus."

Note D. page 470.

I cannot bring myself to adopt the opinion which has of late been so strenuously maintained respecting the millennial advent and reign of Christ. In vain have I sought for any solid and scriptural grounds on which it can be made to rest. Much, indeed, has been said for it; and were mere assertions and fancies sufficient to convince me of the truth of any position, the position referred to would be the object of a conviction stronger than any that I ever entertained. But really mere assertions, however positive, and

mere fancies, however glowing, appear to me not only altogether inadmissible in theological matters, but pregnant with danger both to the faith and the practice of Christians. And I cannot help expressing the deep regret that I feel in seeing so many persons, otherwise worthy of all esteem, and walking in the paths of truth and righteousness, led away with the crude and visionary speculations which have been put forth on this engrossing theme.

It would require many a volume to expose the errors which are now afloat respecting the coming of our Lord; and it will not be expected that within the compass of a note I should be able to do any thing satisfactory in refuting them. Yet I cannot refrain from offering a very few remarks, rather in the way of warning and protest than in that of investigation or of argument.

1. In the *first* place, I feel it impossible to have recourse to the mode of interpreting Scripture which has been employed. Rational and consistent rules of interpretation are neither laid down nor followed. Imagination is allowed to take the most unbounded licence. Objections are made and obviated by some ingenious device, or by a more daring flight of fancy. And when conjecture and subtilty seem to fail, the most haughty dogmatism bears us down with its *dicta*, and our inability to perceive the truth of what is wholly gratuitous in assertion, or utterly extravagant in hypothesis, is compassionately accounted for by our being only babes in spiritual discernment. On these grounds we must believe that the simplest historical fact is a prediction of some grand future event connected with the millennium,—that the whole of the Bible, even the minutest portion of it, is prophetic—that the destruction of the world by *water* was a *type* of the destruction of the world by *fire*,—that even an Apocryphal passage must be considered as a “stray leaf of inspiration,”—and a hundred such absurdities. And then to prevent all rebellion against such an arbitrary method of discovering and establishing the meaning of divine revelation, one tells us, and another tells us, and a third tells us, that until they got these views of prophecy the Scriptures were all dark to them, but that now they find them perfectly clear and intelligible, and that lively is the faith, and great is the comfort, and settled is the peace, and sublime are the hopes, with which they are thereby inspired. And so it may be said of the disciples of Jacob Böhmen and of Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose plan of interpretation is not more arbitrary nor more fanciful than that of the modern millenarians, though their views of divine

things, we apprehend, have occasionally the advantage of being somewhat more spiritual and refined. Had the ancient Jews understood their Scriptures to refer to a Messiah, whose grand purpose was the redemption of the soul, they would have been greatly puzzled, and would have experienced many difficulties, and seen much obscurity in the communications on the subject which they received from Heaven. Nay, they did feel these disadvantages; and, on this account, I doubt not, they took refuge in a literal and carnal interpretation of the language in which Christ's work was foretold; and so firm was their belief in this theory, and so useful did they find it in solving all their doubts, and so happy did it make them in the prospect which it revealed to their anticipations,—that when Christ actually came they did not know that it was he,—he came unto his own but his own did not receive him,—and their earthly, gratuitous, self-sufficient, unwarrantable way of construing those things which were spoken in their lively oracles respecting him who was to come, proved their reproach and their ruin.

2. The terms in which our Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of in reference to his own second coming, are not calculated to make the doctrine very acceptable to us, especially when we consider them as employed in defence of that doctrine, and made an essential part of its defence. One of its great advocates tells us, that Christ was in a mistake as to the length of time during which he was to be absent from his disciples, mentioned in John xvi. 17. The words are these, “a little time” *he* (Christ) *thought it was to be*, and a little time his disciples expected it to be, and a little time it is twice called in the Apocalypse, but for our faithfulness have we been kept so long wandering in this wilderness, and because of the long-suffering of God; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto him and live!” And so Christ had a mere opinion, a simple conjecture on the subject of which he was thus speaking! And he was even wrong therein, as far wrong as his disciples were!! And he was not only destitute of accurate knowledge as to the point in question, but he committed himself by hazarding a “thought” concerning it, which has proved to be incorrect, and which has been made so by our want of faithfulness!!! And he blundered on a question respecting which, men of the present age, who owe all the little gifts and endowments they possess to his Divine bounty, can dogmatize with infallible certainty, even to the year—the month—the day!!!!

3. A charge, as heavy at least as the foregoing, lies against some of the modern millenarians in respect to the Holy Spirit. We "theological babes" are accused of departing from the apostolic mode of preaching the second coming of Christ, because we speak of that event as distant, whereas they spoke of it as just at hand, and to happen before all who were then alive had gone into eternity. And is it really meant to be maintained that the Apostles did any such thing as is thus ascribed to them? Supposing now that the Apostles were no more inspired than we are, have we committed a greater error, in speaking of the event as distant, which, except for the infallibility of fallible interpreters, it may possibly be, than they did in speaking of it as at the very door, which it certainly was not, if history does not deceive us? We may be right, but *they* were certainly wrong. And are the interests of the church to be promoted by its ministers predicting what does not come to pass? But this is the least of the evil that is committed. The millenarians we allude to, do actually impeach the truthfulness or the foresight of the Holy Spirit, by whom it was that the Apostles uttered what they did utter, for the warning and instruction of those to whom they addressed themselves. For it seems the Apostles told the people plainly, and solemnly, that the Second Advent of the Redeemer was to be accomplished immediately, or before the existing generation had departed. Now, it is quite obvious, that the Holy Spirit, in this case, must have prompted the Apostles to intimate an event as instant, which he could not be ignorant was not to happen for at least 1800 years to come, and therefore, instead of being the Spirit of Truth, as he is emphatically called, he is made the Spirit of falsehood and delusion!!! And what are we to think of a theory which not only includes the doing of such dishonour to the third Person of the blessed Trinity, but has for part of its foundation and support, the interpretation of Scripture which involves the blasphemous allegation? The men whose speculations call for this remark I accuse not of any feeling allied or approaching to blasphemy; but their doctrine implies it, not by remote and elaborate inference, but directly, necessarily, and undeniably. And I think it is more than enough to alarm the fears and arrest the progress of those who are surrendering their faith to statements so irreligious, and to arguments so reckless, and who seem to imagine that their attainments in piety and knowledge are to be measured by the devotedness with which they follow those adventurous and oracular theologues whose

theory—I cannot mince the matter—sets at nought the omniscience of the Son of God, our Saviour, and the veracity of the Holy Ghost, who was given to lead the Apostles and the Church “into all the truth.”

4. Some millenarians argue, that the ordinary mode of preaching the doctrine of Christ's second coming, is not so useful as that mode which they have adopted; and in order to make good their point, they not only allege that we impute the whole virtue of our method to the dread reality of death, and the great uncertainty of its period of arrival, but maintain, that the prospect of death has not produced those effects which we ascribe to it on the feelings and character of men.

In point of fact, the prospect of death has exercised a stronger and more beneficial influence, than ever did the prospect of the millennium. For one whose mind has been savingly affected by the latter, an hundred at least have been savingly affected by the former. And had we no other reason to assign for it, the following is perfectly sufficient. With regard to those who may be ranked under the head of unbelievers, death is particularly useful; its certainty cannot be denied by them; its awfulness cannot be unfelt by them; and thus we often see that it is improved by them so as to lead to serious thought, repentance, and salvation. But the millennium, not being to them an object of belief, is laughed at as one of the many visions, as they are pleased to call them, of Christian theology or religious enthusiasm, and laughed at the more because, so far from having the indubitable certainty of death attached to it, it is not even an article in the creed of the majority of professing Christians. And with regard to such as have been converted to Christianity, is it possible that they can be either more comforted in trouble, or more animated in duty, by anticipating the personal advent of Christ, the period of which is, in all likelihood, more distant than the hour of dissolution, and the personal reign of Christ, which is to have its blessedness mixed with warfare and desolation and protracted struggle, (the Redeemer himself being at the head of an army!!!) than by continually looking forward to death, which cannot on any supposition be far distant,—which may come in a day, an hour, a moment—and which not only puts an end to all doing and suffering under the sun, but immediately introduces the believer to that state of glory and blessedness which he is taught to expect even before the resurrection of the body, and on the full enjoyment of which he shall enter as soon as his body is raised from

the grave, and his condition determined openly by the sentence of his Judge?

It is, besides, a misrepresentation to say, that the Scriptures speak exclusively of Christ's personal advent, as that toward which we should look either for a motive to holy living, or for consolation under distress. For what is it by which the lesson is enforced that Christ teaches in the parable of the "rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully?" It is contained in these words, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." What does our Lord himself say? "I must work the works of God while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work?" What does James urge to prevent Christians from presuming on the future? "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." And what is the language of the Apostle Paul, when afflicted, and persecuted, and longing for deliverance? "I have a desire to depart, *and to be with Christ*, which is far better."

Let it be admitted, that the sacred writers generally refer to the second coming of Christ as the thing to which we are to look forward, it must be admitted at the same time, that they also speak of our dissolution as the period which not only necessarily involves, but inevitably settles, our interests in the world of futurity. And if the second coming of Christ is more frequently and prominently presented to our view, it is because that event is a subject of pure revelation which, while it gives to our departure all its vast and unquestionable importance, could not have been known at all unless it had been disclosed to us by the Spirit of God, and might have been feeble in its influence unless it had been made to occur often in the volume of inspiration; whereas death, still recognised in Scripture as full of the deepest moment both to the righteous and the wicked, and as fixing the character with which we are to appear before Christ at his second coming, and according to which our condition in eternity is to be determined, is yet a matter of fact which it requires no miracle to reveal, but which is known to us, and urged upon us, as clearly and certainly and effectually, by the whole history of our race, and by all that is continually passing around us, as if, like the other event with which it stands in intimate and invaluable connection, it had been set before us in the book of God, with all the emphasis of a mysterious and previously undiscovered truth.

The practice of dwelling upon the personal and millennial reign

of Christ upon earth, and almost confining the attention of the church to that prospect, strikes me strongly as having a delusive and dangerous tendency. Granting that the dogma were true, and that it were to be realized in twenty or thirty years, what effect can the exclusive announcement of it have on the fate of myriads, who, from this moment onwards, are passing through the gates of death into the scene of unalterable retribution? Or how can it vie in utility with the practice of directing our efforts vigorously and affectionately to the rescuing fallen men from ignorance, and unbelief, and sin, and perdition? In the one case, we speculate upon the event in question, and embellish it with the charms of poetry, and put forth much concerning it, to which we can find no divine attestation, and extort from the prophecies, a meaning which rests upon no other foundation, perhaps, than our own authority or our own fancy; and all the while we neglect to call sinners to repentance, to preach Christ and him crucified, to strive for the conversion and redemption of the many that are perishing around us, and whom the millennial advent of Christ can neither console, nor animate, nor profit, unless they have been brought to that faith in the righteousness of Jesus, by which alone we are assured they can be saved in the day of the Lord. In the other case, we are occupied mainly, constantly, and above all, in calling upon sinners to turn from the evil of their ways, in directing them to Him who alone can deliver them from guilt and ruin, in persuading them to take shelter under the merits of his cross, and so to embrace him, and so to abide by him, and so to walk with him, as that their future well-being shall be secure, and that whether the theory of a personal reign be correct or not, they shall go into rest and glory, at the instant of their leaving this world, and have an entrance abundantly ministered to them into the Saviour's kingdom. Which of these methods of preaching the Gospel is most accordant to the example of the apostle, or promises to be most effectual in advancing the great object for which the Son of God was manifested in the "likeness of sinful flesh?"

But I must not add to these remarks. In the sermons to which this note is appended, I have, without taking in the doctrine of a personal reign on earth, identified the death of the believer and the second coming of Christ, as to their practical influence, and as to the import of that scriptural phraseology by which we ought, in

such cases, to be guided. It is allowed on all hands, that Christ will come again to judge the world in righteousness, and that we must all appear before his tribunal to receive from him according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad. It is likewise allowed on all hands, that it is appointed for every one of us once to die, and that whenever we die, our fate for eternity is certainly and unchangeably determined. And consequently, while on the one hand, it is the second appearance of Christ which gives to our death all the interest and importance which it can possess with regard to beings constituted as we are for retribution and immortality, the certainty which attaches to death, on the other hand, and the uncertainty which prevails with regard to the time of its arrival, are equivalent in their proper influence to the same character of certainty and uncertainty, severally, as belonging to the final advent of the Redeemer. For though the fancied glories and felicities of the millennial reign of Christ with his saints in this world, may be very striking to our conceptions as familiar, through the medium of the senses, with the aspect and objects and circumstances of the material scene which we now inhabit, it is not easy to perceive why we should not be still more affected by the hope of reigning with Christ in that heaven which he has revealed as the object of our believing anticipations. Heaven is a state into which we are assured that he will introduce us as soon as our eyes are closed on the present scene. It stands before the eye of our mind as a real and veritable consummation, free from the obscurity which seems, according to the modern millennarian scheme, to hang over our existence, between the period of dissolution and that of the resurrection. And it does not preclude our admission, when the dead shall be raised up, into that new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, and which shall, without delay, come in the room of that visible system of things in which we are now placed, but which will pass away under the rebuke of God, and become as if it had never been. And this hope will the more powerfully influence us, as it is quickened and strengthened by the truth, which is not only taught us in the word of inspiration, but exemplified in the every day's experience of mortal men, and pressed upon our keenest and tenderest sympathies, that our souls may be suddenly and unexpectedly required of us, and that live as long as we may, a few short years at the most will bring us to our great reckoning, and our glorious reward.

I cannot conclude without adding that for not a few of the modern millenarians I cherish very great personal respect and esteem, as men of Christian devotedness and of no ordinary talent ; that instead of blaming them for studying the prophets, I regard their example in this point as worthy of praise and imitation, though their mode of proceeding appears to me reprehensible, and their general conclusions unwarranted ; that I am as far as they are from deeming any portion of God's word undeserving of serious perusal, but that, if a choice is to be made, I must deem the ground of a sinner's hope the most momentous by far of all the subjects that can be treated of ; and that I should have a higher opinion both of their wisdom and their Christianity, would they deal more cautiously and reverently with certain fundamental tenets of the Gospel, and more discreetly and tenderly with those who have searched the Scriptures longer than the most dogmatical of their number have yet done, and have not found themselves justified in departing from the common faith.

FINIS.

EDINBURGH .

PRINTED BY A. BALFOUR AND CO. NIDDRY STREET